

FEBRUARY 2006

IN THESE TIMES

SPYING ON AMERICANS
WALKING TO GUANTANAMO
LABOR'S PARADIGM SHIFT
SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK ON "24"



CAN **BLOGS**

REVOLUTIONIZE PROGRESSIVE
POLITICS?

BY LAKSHMI CHAUDHRY

In These Times:

29 Years of Telling Truth to Power



Keep Up the Good Fight for Social and Economic Justice

Leo W. Gerard

Leo W. Gerard
International President

Leon Lynch

Leon Lynch
International Vice President



USW



James D. English

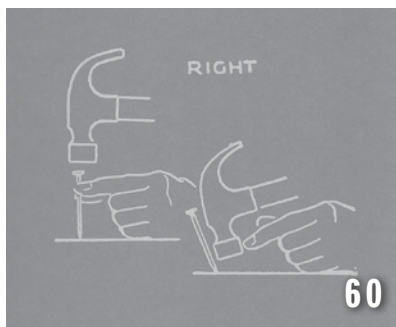
James D. English
International Secretary-Treasurer

Thomas M. Conway

Thomas M. Conway
International Vice President

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editorial

An Imperial President

EVEN BEFORE HIS confirmation hearings for the Supreme Court, it was clear that Judge Samuel Alito believed in the obscure doctrine of the “unitary executive.” After the hearings, we still don’t know exactly what Alito thinks about the limits, if any, of presidential power. But in the Bush era, few issues are more important.

The doctrine of the unitary executive—that is, an executive branch under the control of the president alone—is not clearly established by either the Constitution or historical precedent. For some observers it means, relatively uncontroversially, that the president should have supervisory authority over members of the executive. For others, it means that Congress can’t establish agencies, like the Securities and Exchange Commission that are independent of the president. But it could also mean that, acting as commander-in-chief and exercising war powers, the president can do almost anything he deems necessary, and neither the courts nor Congress can intervene.

It’s this latter, dangerous view that Bush appears to hold. Of the Supreme Court justices, Clarence Thomas has taken the most radical stance, supporting the government’s right to detain even American citizens as enemy combatants without charges. Thomas’ public views still fall short of the arguments made by John Yoo, former deputy assistant attorney general in Bush’s Office of Legal Counsel, who defends the president’s right to order torture if he deems it necessary for national security.

Bush’s claims to unchecked power have grown as the legitimacy of his policies has collapsed. In response to legislation prohibiting torture sponsored by Sen. John McCain, Bush claimed to be exempt, even as he signed the law. When leakers revealed that the National Security Administration had been spying on thousands of Americans, without judicial warrants and in knowing violation of the Foreign Intelligence and Surveillance Act, Bush defended his lawbreaking. (See

“The First Stone,” page 20.)

The challenge to law and democracy posed by the Bush administration’s actions is especially dangerous because Bush’s claim to war powers and the impunity of the unitary executive lies on two deeply flawed grounds. First, he claims to be commander-in-chief of an endless “war on terror” that bears no relation to any previous war. And he asserts his power as commander of an undeclared war in Iraq that was sold on the basis of deliberate lies.

Previous presidents have abused power in wartime and lied to promote war. But Al Gore was right in his fiery address on Martin Luther King’s birthday that the threat is much greater under Bush, because of the embrace of the unitary executive theory by both his administration and probably—with Alito’s likely confirmation—by at least four members of the Supreme Court.

Ironically, as the United States justifies the aggressive use of force around the world in the name of “freedom” and “the rule of law,” both are increasingly in danger here. The threat of an imperial presidency, which has reached its highest level under Bush, is a corollary of an imperialist foreign policy that threatens both Americans and the rest of the world.

While Bush’s transgressions may be impeachable offenses, impeachment is ultimately as much a political as a legal process, and politically, it is impossible now. It makes more sense to relentlessly focus public attention and political organizing on this administration’s violations of law, as Gore did, and work to elect legislators who will challenge the administration. Already, some polls show a slim majority of the public thinks that Bush should be impeached if he lied to the American people. But it may be counterproductive to push impeachment until the political capacity exists to make it not merely a rhetorical sword but a real defense against an imperial, deceitful presidency that is a growing cancer on the nation.

—David Moberg

IN THESE TIMES

“With liberty and justice for all...”

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mixed reaction

QUID PRO QUO

THE QUID:

The January 1 *Washington Post* reported that an internal BellSouth Corp. spreadsheet identified more than 80 congressmen and aides who had accepted entertainment, drinks and dinner from the company's lobbyists that exceeded the limits of congressional gifts. One of the aides flagged was Michael "Sully" Sullivan, senior technology adviser to Sen. John Ensign (R-Nev.), who was entertained 19 times by BellSouth lobbyists between March and November.

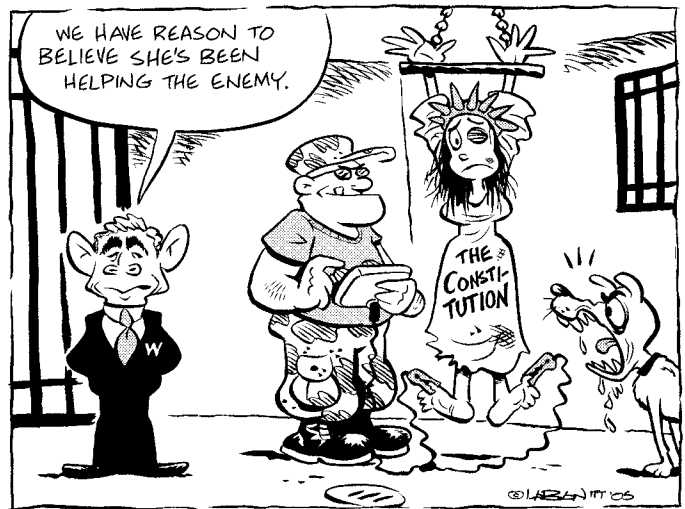
THE QUO:

In what can only be an unhappy coincidence, in July, Ensign introduced the Orwellian-named "Broadband Consumer Choice Act," which has received outspoken support from BellSouth. Critics charge that Ensign's bill would remove local oversight of BellSouth, allow the company to "redline" poor areas when rolling out their new TV service and effectively ban municipalities from providing their own broadband services.

“ So a blog is web log? Is there an apostrophe, or do you guys not even have the strength for that? You're just gonna jam two words together? ”

STEPHEN COLBERT INTERVIEWING ANDREW SULLIVAN
THE COLBERT REPORT, JANUARY 17, 2006

BY TERRY LABAN



the lexicon

eavesdrop: v. (-dropped, -dropping)
[intrans].

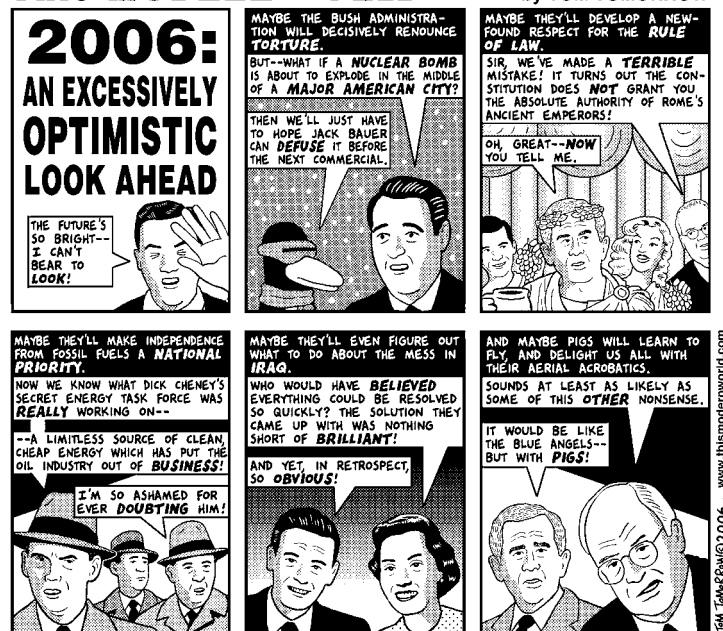
TRADITIONAL USAGE: to secretly listen to a conversation. Implies a small transgression, a moral misdemeanor.

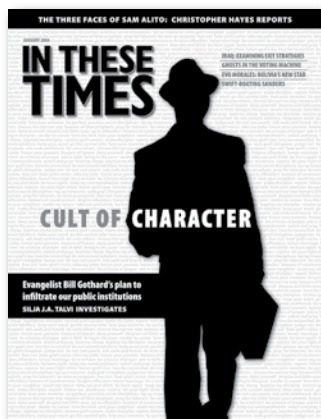
CURRENT USAGE: A comprehensive and technologically sophisticated attempt by the largest intelligence agency in the history of human civilization to monitor the private correspondences of American citizens without warrant or due process.

"Months after the Sept. 11 attacks, President Bush secretly authorized the National Security Agency to eavesdrop on Americans," read the first sentence of a December 16 *New York Times* article that broke the story. The article went on to estimate that as many as 500 Americans might be subject to the warrantless "eavesdropping" at any one time.

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW





A Dose of Calomel

Congratulations on a fine transition to a monthly format, losing none of your spark. It was disappointing, though, to see Silja Talvi take up more than 15 percent of the space with “Cult of Character” (January 2006) yet hardly mention any of the precursors and competitors to Bill Gothard and his Character Training Institute—some of them more colorful, memorable and successful than he. I well remember similar “characters” invited into public schools I attended 50 years ago, preaching similar gospels, typically laced with a strong dose of calomel for the “Communist menace.” Social histories of the United States recount practitioners of such arts for at least 300 years. Who could forget Cotton Mather, Father Coughlin or our narrower gauge Boston figure, Father Feeney? Talvi would have done better to show Bill Gothard as a recent traveler on a well-worn path.

*Craig Bolon
Brookline, Mass.*

Theonomy Light

Thank you for writing a well-researched piece on Bill Gothard’s relationship with the Character Training Institute (CTI). There has been hardly any public discussion of this issue, apart from a couple of squabbles in Florida. I haven’t seen any comments about the 100 percent attendance of juvenile prisoners in the Oklahoma County jail, for example. Whole cities have adopted the Character First! system, to varying extents of pervasiveness, without much controversy.

Evangelicals and fundamentalists have long criticized Gothard’s theology, but they seem to have been silent about the CTI. Secularists and other non-evangelicals are hardly aware of Gothard’s existence, so they don’t seem to have noticed what is happening.

Something that I would like to see examined is the extent to which Gothard’s ideas about gender are incorporated into the CTI material given to school children. It would also be interesting to know just how influential Gothard’s ideas about contraception and childbirth are among families and midwifery practitioners.

Without such an analysis, it’s hard to see how any widespread concern about CTI could be aroused. As Talvi wrote, who could argue against “character”? At first glance, Character First! looks little different from the more widely supported Character Counts! or all the other character education systems being peddled to school boards. Like Tim LaHaye and James Dobson, albeit at a lower level of technical

sophistication, Gothard has found ways to plug his theology into a smorgasbord of American folk psychological notions, so that his theological notions have been easy to translate into popular self-help moralism. This has attracted a great deal less attention than abstinence-only sex education, for example, where attempts to disguise the religious character of the program have been unconvincing.

Where the Christian Reconstructionists and other advocates of theonomy appear to have stalled somewhat, because of the opposition of both evangelicals and other faith communities, Gothard’s disciples appear to have found a way to slip their conceptual system into the mainstream of civil society. What their long-term goals might be remains unclear.

Is CTI just a stalking-horse for Gothard, insinuating his ideas into everyday life so that mission work will follow naturally from everyday acquaintance with the 49 character qualities? Is the intention to create local theonomic communities? Or has there been a decision to settle for Theonomy Lite, creating a society in which the faithful can have more influence and exist more comfortably?

*David Harley
South Bend, Ind.*

Don’t Sing and Divine

Just after I read Craig Aaron’s review of *Rednecks & Bluenecks* (“Country’s Jingoistic Jingles,” January 2006), I heard Darryl Worley’s pro-war “Have You Forgotten” on my radio. It is still played occasionally on three

country-western stations in my area, as is Toby Keith’s song and Alan Jackson’s “Where Were You (When the World Stopped Turning).” As one who has been listening to country-western music for 70 years and who has been a polemicist for peace for nearly 50 of those years, I have been more than a little upset by the jingoistic trend in country-western music.

Even before Imperial George stole the White House, I had noted another disturbing trend in country-western songs—more frequent appearances of angels (“Wild,” “Concrete”) and mentions of Jesus and other Christian subjects. Alan Jackson’s 9/11 song managed to combine the two emphases, with his lyrics, “I know Jesus and I talk to God.”

Part of my objection to this trend is because of my pacifist and atheist views, but as a music lover, I don’t believe anything worthwhile, musically, can come from this intrusion.

*William F. Roberts
Otega, N.Y.*

CORRECTIONS

“Snap, Crackle Patents” (January 2006) misstated the federal appeals court that issued the *State Street v. Signature Financial* decision. It was the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit, not the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit.

“Islam Needs Radicals” (November 21, 2005) erroneously stated that heavy metal musician Reda Zine had been arrested by the Moroccan government. In fact, Zine has never been arrested. We regret these errors.

Dear Readers:

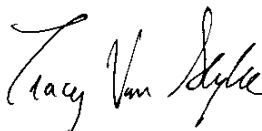
For progressives, 2006 is a year to build on the political organizing that came to the fore in the 2004 presidential election. *In These Times* continues to play an integral role in this effort by reporting the stories and providing the independent analysis progressives need to educate and persuade the electorate in 2006 and beyond. We must use the media as a tool for social change in our communities.

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Publisher

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Don't miss our exclusive Web-only stories:

MSNBC commentator Flavia Colgan critiques the response of left-wing activists and Democratic politicians to the Alito hearings.

Salim Muwakkil reflects on Tookie Williams' execution and the need for new leadership in black communities.

Aaron Sarver and Jessica Pupovac discuss the political implications of the Chicago Transit Authority's unofficial refusal of steeply discounted fuel from Venezuela.

Also: Listen to "Fire on the Prairie", a radio forum sponsored by *In These Times*. This month: Chesa Boudin, co-editor of *Letters from Young Activists*, speaks about youth activism, and Glen Ford, publisher of *BlackCommentator.com*, talks about the recent victory of California workers in a lawsuit against Wal-Mart.

How do you think Ariel Sharon's stroke will affect the peace process?

Less violence, Sharon
was a man of war

12%

More violence, Sharon was
making progress

12%

Too early to say
30%

It won't, their
problems are bigger
than one person
47%

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CARLO ALLEGRI/GETTY IMAGES

Washington lobbyist Jack Abramoff arrives at the Federal Justice Building in Miami on January 4.

Witness for the Prosecution

Abramoff's plea agreement could land him in the middle of a murder trial

BY RICHARD L. FRICKER

A FLORIDA HIT MAN. A high-powered lobbyist. A pair of disgraced Republican congressmen. The ingredients for a potboiler novel? No—this is what passes for political news in the age of Abramoff.

In a trial scheduled to start in early February, Brian Cavanaugh, an assistant state attorney in Broward County, Fla. is prosecuting three men for the murder of former SunCruz Casino cruise ships owner Konstantinos “Gus” Boulis. And he wants to talk to Abramoff and a close business associate, Adam Kidan, about what role, if any, they played in the murder.

For years, the two men were high-

rolling, hobnobbing lobbyists, rubbing elbows with best of Washington Republican society. But their political connections could not save them from a slew of recent indictments handed down for crimes including fraud, conspiracy and bribery. Specifically, Abramoff and Kidan have pled guilty to a \$23 million dollar wire fraud involving the purchase of SunCruz Casino. As a part of their deals, they must cooperate with “all” law enforcement agencies, including Cavanaugh’s.

The man they defrauded was Boulis, who was driving his car in Ft. Lauderdale on February 6, 2001, when two cars boxed him in. A third car going in the

opposite direction pulled up to his side and its driver shot Boulis three times in the chest.

Charged with the murder are Anthony Ferrari, James Fiorillo and former Gambino family bookkeeper Anthony Moscatiello. Also under investigation is Moscatiello’s daughter, Jennifer, who along with her father received \$145,000 from Kidan for catering and “other” services. There is no evidence that food or services were ever provided.

What does Abramoff—the dapper fixer from Capitol Hill—have to do with three mugs and a moll? He’s already admitted to using his powerful lobbying firm to bribe politicians, defraud Native American tribes out of millions and help to ensure that migrant workers in the Marianas Islands earn slave wages. Around that same time, in 2000, he was also tricking Gus Boulis out of his SunCruz Casino gambling ships.

The roots of this scam go way back: Abramoff and Kidan had known each other since the ’80s as active members of the College Republicans national office. According to Kidan’s deposition, he was nearly broke when Abramoff brought him into the deal to buy SunCruz. After a contentious negotiations period that drew on for months, in September 2000, the pair finally managed to persuade investors to go along with the arrangement by claiming they had put up \$23 million of their own money for the deal, offering phony wire transfers as evidence.

But when it came time to pay Boulis, Abramoff and Kidan were \$23 million short. When Boulis wanted to be paid, he went to Kidan for the money and a fistfight broke out between the two men. Kidan came away spreading the story that Boulis had promised to kill him.

The fracas sparked a federal investigation, and within a few months Abramoff and Kidan were charged with fraud regarding the SunCruz purchase. During a 2001 civil case, Kidan also admitted that he paid the men now charged with Boulis’ murder \$250,000, including the \$145,000 paid to Anthony and Jennifer Moscatiello.

Because of Abramoff's connections, the SunCruz purchase had been of great interest to some members on Capitol Hill. In March 2000, Rep. Robert W. Ney (R-Ohio)—at the urging of Michael Scanlon, a former spokesman for Tom DeLay, and a business partner of Abramoff—placed a scathing attack on Boulis in the Congressional Record.

"Mr. Speaker, how SunCruz Casinos and Gus Boulis conduct themselves with regard to Florida laws is very unnerving," Ney said. "I don't want to see the actions of one bad apple in Florida, or anywhere else . . . affect the business aspect of this industry or hurt any innocent casino patron in our country."

Ney has fallen far. One of those bright stars who came to Congress in 1994 with a "Contract with America," his contract expired January 14 of this year, when he was compelled to step down from his post as Chairman of the Committee on House Administration. Abramoff fingered Ney and others to get his plea agreement, and even the GOP leadership thought it a little unseemly to have the committee charged with reforming lobbying laws chaired by someone un-

der investigation for accepting bribes.

Now, Ney is best known for joining Abramoff and Ralph Reed of the Christian Coalition in Scotland for an infamous round of golf. A lot of Abramoff money found its way into Reed's Christian Coalition causes and the Coalition turned out the vote for George W. Bush. It was a game of political connections and money, and no one cared how it was played as long as they got their share.

Abramoff's influence also reached more directly into the White House, where he regularly took clients. This began to emerge when David H. Safavian, the White House's chief procurement officer, resigned on September 19, 2005, only to be arrested the following day for lying to investigators and obstructing an investigation into Abramoff's activities.

However, White House Press Secretary Scott McClellan has refused to disclose information requested by reporters about Abramoff's White House activities. It is unclear if he will get back with answers about Abramoff before he clears up similar questions about Jeff Gannon's White House comings and goings. In either case, a vast array of

characters seems to have had wide access to the White House.

Those characters may be uncovered as Cavanaugh sets his sights on interviewing the Abramoff crew during his continuing investigation into the Boulis murder. Abramoff has not directly been implicated in the murder, but Cavanaugh is keeping his options open.

As *In These Times* went to press, the Boulis murder trial was set to begin. Cavanaugh noted recently that under the Florida criminal code, discovery can be conducted by either side where in a witness can be deposed before trial. Should the defense lawyers for the hit men decide to depose Abramoff, Scanlon or Kidan, they could be compelled to tell all they know as required by their plea agreements.

Cavanaugh says he will wait to see what emerges from these conversations and depositions before making any final plans about the trial or additional indictments. ■

RICHARD L. FRICKER is a two-time winner of the American Business Press Editors Award for Investigative Journalism and writes regularly for the Swiss newsweekly *Sonntags Blick*.

**What do
Buddha,
Noam Chomsky,
Aristotle,
Einstein,
Helen Keller,
Mother Jones, and
Frederick Douglass
have in common?**

**Their religion? No.
Their politics? No.
Their gender or
time period or nation? No...**

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MICHAEL DANIELS/MICHAEL WITHERS

A make shift memorial is set up for the Sago miners.

Coal Miners' Slaughter

FOR A COUPLE of klieg-lit days in rainy West Virginia, we were reminded—once again—that the dark and hidden project of coaxing coal from the earth remains a deadly business. The January 2 nightmare of Tallmansville added 12 victims to history's mountain of slain miners. Tallied as regrettable isolated incidents, these deaths were in many ways predictable fallout from corporate profit pressures and permissive government regulation.

A brief torrent of news coverage sketched a scofflaw mine with a long paper trail of unchecked safety violations. The Sago mine, first under its bankrupt former owner, Anker Coal Group, Inc., and now the International Coal Group (ICG), had an egregious record: 208 health and safety citations in 2005, nearly half of them "significant and substantial;" 17 citations for "aggravated conduct constituting more than ordinary negligence;" and triple the coal industry average for serious injuries resulting in lost work time.

Late last year, three orders had been issued to close portions of the mine. Despite numerous serious violations—including several roof collapses and accumulation of combustible materials—Sago's operators were fined a grand total of only \$24,155, with many fines as low as \$60.

Widening the lens, the Sago tragedy showed that America's industrial work-

ers face deadly labor conditions due to anemic—and politically hogtied—government safety enforcement. Each year, more than 6,000 workers die and 4.5 million are injured on the job. A meager force of 1,100 Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) inspectors is charged with assuring safety for 115 million workers at more than 7 million work sites.

The prospect of dying underground weighs daily on miners as they tunnel into the earth, lured by wages that far exceed the impoverished alternatives in coal country. Despite mechanization and declining fatalities in recent decades, mining (including coal, iron and other forms) is the second most perilous sector of the economy, after agriculture—with a death rate seven times that of the general work force.

The official death toll doesn't account for coal miners' greatest lurking threat, pneumoconiosis. Quietly, more than 1,000 miners and ex-miners perish each year (15,000 died during the '90s) from

black lung disease. In Appalachian mining towns, it's not uncommon to see frail, discolored retirees ambling slowly, oxygen tank and breathing tube in tow.

Coal miners have been further imperiled in recent years by an erosion of government safety protections, hastened by Bush administration appointments and cuts. A 2003 Government Accountability Office study on mine safety enforcement found that ventilation and roof inspections were inadequate; hazards identified by inspectors were not fixed promptly; and that "although about 44 percent of MSHA's (Mine Safety and Health Administration) underground coal mine inspectors will be eligible to retire in the next five years, the agency has no plan for replacing them ... the potential shortage of inspectors may limit MSHA's ability to ensure the safety and health of underground coal miners."

While the Bush administration, with Congress' help, allowed its 2005 proposal to increase penalties for mine safety violations to die on the vine, its 2006 budget proposes a \$4.9 million cut in real dollar terms to mine safety programs. (It also proposed to slash \$6.7 million in real dollars from OSHA.) Since 2001, MSHA

act now



SWEET SUBVERSION

For all of those who thought the ice cream truck driver was up to something suspicious, now there's confirmation. The Tactical Ice Cream Unit—the latest project of the Bay Area's Center for Tactical Magic—offers onlookers free ice cream and informative materials authored by local progressive groups. The truck also functions as a war room on wheels, boasting video surveillance equipment, a PA system, satellite Internet and a media studio capable of broadcasting live video and audio feeds. "Whether lurking in a corporate park or chillin' in a neighborhood park," their Web site boasts, "the Tactical Ice Cream Unit is sure to attract people from all walks of life." For more information on the TICU's national tour, visit Tacticalmagic.org

cut some 170 staffers, nearly 10 percent of the federal mine safety team.

Equally troubling, between 2000 and 2002, the number of government-approved mine disaster rescue teams declined by 10 percent. While federal law requires two rescue teams per mine, as of 2004 “there was only one team for every four underground coal mines in the country,” the *Charleston (W.V.) Gazette* reported. In December 2002, the Bush administration scuttled a MSHA working group convened during the Clinton years to improve mine rescue efforts. In the Sago disaster, it took more than 11 excruciating hours to assemble a backup team, likely hindering rescue efforts.

Mirroring its pro-corporate regulatory approach, the Bush administration has stacked the MSHA leadership with former industry executives. The current nominee to head MSHA, Richard Stickler, is an industry manager who “ran mines with injury rates twice the national average,” according to the *Gazette*. Other top MSHA officials include former executives for Amax Mining, Peabody Energy, Massey Energy and the American Mining Congress.

“With mining company officials at the helm of MSHA, the agency’s focus has clearly shifted away from protecting miners,” wrote Reps. George Miller (D-Calif.) and Major Owens (D-N.Y.) in a letter calling for congressional hearings. They cite a 2005 AFL-CIO finding that since Bush took office, MSHA has withdrawn 17 standards designed to improve miners’ health and safety—including regulations on air quality, chemical substances and respiratory rules.

Mining’s hazards, particularly at non-union operations such as Sago, may be inflamed by intensifying production pressures. As oil and gas prices spiral, coal is in soaring demand. Coal prices have reached record highs, yet are still far below rates for other fossil fuels. Roughly half of America’s electricity is now coal-powered, a resurgence that bodes ill for the environment and global warming concerns.

“The structure of the power market is seeing a radical shift away from gas and towards coal,” a top power industry official told the *Financial Times*, which reported that orders for coal-powered electricity turbines are expected to rise dramatically in the next decade.

Only 11 percent of America’s 108,000 miners are unionized (compared with

a dismal 8.6 percent of all private-sector workers), placing the fate of most miners in the hands of production-hungry coal corporations and a compromised government safety regime. Nonunion workers have no job security, no protection against company reprisals if they complain about hazards.

As the *Gazette* opined, “Until the nation gets serious about enforcing safety rules, miners and their families will continue to suffer to satisfy the nation’s energy appetite.” But the Sago nightmare, and ensuing congressional investigations, should shine a bright light not only on the forensics of underground coal mine safety, but on dismal government enforcement of safety for all workers.

—Christopher Cook

Backdoor Draft, Back Again

FOR MORE THAN 800 members of the Army’s Individual Ready Reserve (IRR), the most memorable part of the holiday season was a surprise stocking-stuffer from the United States Army. It came in the form of a blue and white Western Union Mailgram that ordered them to report for active duty in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Eric, a second-year law student, who completed four years of active duty in 2002, was at his parents’ house on Christmas Eve when they handed him what looked like an innocuous piece of mail from the Secretary of the Army. “I was pretty shocked,” Eric (not his real name) says. “I went up to my room and hyper-ventilated for a bit and then came back

down and didn’t tell anyone for two days. I didn’t want to ruin Christmas.”

You might remember this practice by the name critics gave it during the 2004 presidential election: the “backdoor draft.” In June of that year, the Pentagon announced the initial call-ups of the IRR—a rarely-deployed group of about 114,000 soldiers who have completed their active duty requirements and returned to civilian life. This raised the specter of soldiers being pulled back into military service against their will, generating headlines, controversy and uncomfortable memories of Vietnam. It also proved to be such a headache to administer that in November 2005 the Army appeared to capitulate to pressure by suspending the program. But as *In These Times* has learned, the program has not been suspended. In exclusive interviews, six soldiers who received mobilization orders expressed anger and frustration about what they say is a bad-faith effort by the Army to wring extra service out of those who are about to complete their service commitment. Nearly all asked that their names be changed in this article for fear of reprisal as they negotiate their responses to these orders.

“Back when people started using the phrase ‘backdoor draft,’ I was really skeptical,” says one ex-ROTC cadet, who strongly opposes the Iraq war. “Now that I’ve been served papers, it really does feel like that.”

All of the officers interviewed who received orders to deploy in late December have one thing in common: They all started active duty in 1998, which means their full 8-year contract with the Army—or Mandatory Service Obligation (MSO)—will expire in May. “We’re all coming up on our MSO dates,” says Jason, who along with about 40 other members of West

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Point's Class of 1998 received a call-up. "I get the impression that they did a check to see who they were coming close to losing and went ahead and sent out the orders." Army spokeswoman Lt. Col. Pamela Hart denied this, insisting that "no population was singled out."

With only four months left before being officially discharged, Jason and others now face an 18-month tour of active duty in Iraq. "The Army is using two different rules for their benefit," says Paul Trotter, an ex-ROTC cadet who has already served in both Afghanistan and Iraq. "They've got one rule that says we can call you up from the IRR at any point before your obligation is done. They've got another rule that says once you're on active duty, we can Stop-Loss you so you have to stay." The Army's Stop-Loss program, initiated in November 2002, allows it to indefinitely extend the term of active duty soldiers past their scheduled release date.

That means that for thousands of soldiers, the contract they signed pledging eight years of service no longer holds any weight. In January 2004, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld signed an authorization for involuntary mobilization. The IRR was last called up during the first Gulf

War. But then, soldiers were deployed to backfill Army positions in Germany and other bases rather than deployed directly into the combat theater. "When I was in the army, it was clear that if you're in the IRR, the only time you're going to go off to war is World War III," says Kevin O'Meara, a 43-year-old former Army human resources officer. O'Meara received a mobilization order in 2004 from which he was subsequently exempted. "The IRR was not designed for what was supposed to be this little jaunt in the desert."

"When I signed my contract, the impression was that the IRR was rarely used, only in a national emergency," says Jason. "I didn't think it would be used as a manpower tool to support an occupation."

From the moment the IRR call-up was announced in the summer of 2004, the Army had a difficult time enforcing its order. The Army was forced to abandon attempts to mobilize thousands of officers who had completed their eight-year commitment but hadn't sent in the paperwork to remove their names from the IRR rolls. As of December 11, 2005, of the 7,380 soldiers who received orders to mobilize, 3,521 have filed for exemptions or delays and nearly 500 have simply not shown up.

On November 18 the *Washington Post* reported that the Army was throwing in the towel. The Army has "suspended plans to expand an unwieldy, 16-month-old program to call up inactive soldiers for military duty," the *Post* reported, "after thousands have requested delays or exemptions or failed to show up."

For many soldiers, this meant they were off the hook. "I felt relieved after that *Washington Post* article," says Jason, the West Point grad. "Then on the 20th of December, I get the mailgram."

Lt. Col. Hart says that the December mobilization orders are all part of the original involuntary mobilization authorized in 2004 and that the Army will continue to issue such orders until it has successfully deployed 5,600 active-duty soldiers from the ranks of the IRR. So far, nearly 4,000 have deployed.

"We have 114,000 soldiers in the IRR and we're only looking at 7,000 who've received orders," Hart says. "Now mind you, it can be traumatic for the individual soldier, but looking at the big picture it's understandable."

The news of the orders quickly spread among soldiers, as many scrambled to figure out their options. O'Meara, who has

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covered the issue on his blog, the Command T.O.C., says nearly two dozen soldiers have contacted him, seeking advice on how to file for exemptions. Most exemptions, he says, are initially denied, but many succeed on appeal. So far, the Army has issued 1,616 of them. Every soldier interviewed for this article said they intend to file for an exemption based on health, family or schooling circumstances.

What frustrates these soldiers the most is a sense that the Army isn't being straight with them. "Back in July in '04 when I left active duty, if they'd said 'You can't leave, you have to do another tour,' I wouldn't have been happy about it," says Paul Trotter, who is seeking an exemption so he can continue to help home-school his autistic, seven-year-old son. "But I'd have much rather done that than have a life set up and a job and moved and all that stuff and then be told pull chalks out of that and go back to Iraq."

More confounding, each soldier had received phone calls and/or emails shortly before their mailgrams asking if they'd like to volunteer for the same deployment to which they've since been ordered. "I want to emphasize that we are only establishing a volunteer roster at this time," wrote an Army Career Management officer in an email to Jason two weeks before he received his mailgram.

The day after receiving his orders, Jason called the Career officer thinking there had been some mistake. "She said she was kind of upset with the way it had been handled," he says. "It turns out they had intended all along to call up everyone they contacted. It was never going to be voluntary."

The Army's effort to pull soldiers into active duty service just a few months before their contracts expire suggests that despite talk of draw-downs, military leaders anticipate that Operation Iraqi Freedom will need every last body they can get for the foreseeable future.

"There's this lack of courage on the part of politicians to admit that they need more bodies to do this," Eric says. "If the Army started a general draft there'd be public outcry, but because they're targeting people in the military who fear reprisal, people stay quiet about it and try to deal with it on their own."

"The basis of this is not a national emergency," says one officer, who echoed the sentiments of the group. "What this is is poor personnel planning."

—Christopher Hayes

snapshot



A Malian girl sells carrots during the opening march of the 6th World Social Forum (WSF) in Bamako, Mali, where on January 19 thousands of people gathered to challenge neoliberalism. This year, the WSF went "polycentric," with additional forums in Caracas, Venezuela and Karachi, Pakistan. (Photo by Jean-Philippe Ksiazek/AFP/Getty Images)

Recess Appointments Reek of Cronyism

AFTER LAST YEAR'S Katrina and Supreme Court fiascos provoked catcalls of "cronyism" from all sides, the Bush administration learned something about making appointments. The lesson: Be more subtle.

On January 4, Bush used the congressional recess to bypass the Senate confirmation process and appoint 17 officials to posts in the State Department, Federal Election Commission, National Labor Relations Board and other federal offices. The recess appointments avoided floor fights over dubiously credentialed nominees, including a former oil executive, a former president of a weapons manufacturer and a relative of a cabinet employee. All told, they include eight donors to Bush's presidential campaigns.

Two of the appointees are 2004 Bush-Cheney Campaign "Rangers," supporters who are being rewarded for having "bun-

dled" at least \$200,000 in \$2,000 contributions from individuals. Among the 221 Rangers were Roger Wallace, who was named to the Board of Directors of the Inter-American Foundation, and Stephen Goldsmith, who now sits on the Board of Directors of the Corporation for National and Community Service.

Both appointees to the Amtrak Reform Board also contributed to his re-election. Floyd Hall, the former CEO of K-Mart who shepherded the company to Chapter 11, has donated \$453,000 to the GOP since 1996. Enrique Sosa, a retired oil executive from Florida, has given more than \$22,000 to Bush and the RNC since 2000. In June 2004, Sosa admitted to Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D-N.J.) that he's never ridden an Amtrak train but would be happy to do so if confirmed.

Others, like Gordon England, the pick for Deputy Secretary of Defense, do have experience related to their new office. England's résumé includes a stint as vice-president of General Dynamics Corporation and president of General Dynamics Fort Worth Aircraft Company (later purchased by Lockheed Martin). General Dy-

namics, a top weapons manufacturer, regularly rakes in more than \$8 billion a year in government contracts. Since 2000, the company has given more than \$5 million to political candidates, with 58 percent of the money directed to Republicans.

Although nine of the 17 recess appointees have personally contributed a total of \$440,585 to either Bush or the Republican Party since 1999, issuing a check isn't the only way to get an appointment.

Hans von Spakovsky, a former Republican Party chairman in Fulton County, Ga., worked for the Bush-Cheney 2000 election effort as a volunteer during the Florida recount. But his greatest contribution to the campaign may have been a 1997 article he penned for the Georgia Public Policy Foundation that encouraged states to aggressively purge their voter rolls of alleged felons. When implemented in Florida, the plan led to the disenfranchisement of an estimated 2,873 mostly minority voters. Von Spakovsky's new job? A post on the Federal Election Commission (FEC).

Joining von Spakovsky on the FEC as one of the legally required Democratic members is Robert D. Lenhard, who as an attorney for the American Federation

of State County and Municipal Employees argued that the Supreme Court should deem the 2002 McCain-Feingold campaign finance reform law unconstitutional.

"[Bush] has appointed people [to the FEC] who have no interest in regulating special interest money in campaigns and elections," says Public Citizen's Frank Clemente, director of Congress Watch. "They get to draft regulations to implement campaign finance laws," which can make "the difference between whether the law has teeth or is a toothless tiger."

Another player from the 2000 Bush-Cheney campaign is Ellen Sauerbrey, who chaired the Bush-Cheney campaign in Maryland. She is now the assistant secretary of state for the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration. Sauerbrey's appointment is a sop to the Christian right. Since 2003 she has served on the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women, where she has been an outspoken opponent of family planning and abortion rights.

Past support for Bush's policies appears to have helped the appointment of Tracy Henke, the new executive director of the Office of State and Local Government Coordination and Preparedness of the

Department of Homeland Security, and Peter Kirsanow, a new member of the National Labor Relations Board. Henke has been accused of deleting relevant information from Justice Department reports that documented racial disparities in the treatment of motorists stopped by police. Kirsanow, who is African American, opposes affirmative action and an increase in the minimum wage. As a member of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, he suggested, post-9/11, that should another terrorist attack be committed by Arabs, the group "can forget about civil rights."

And then there are always "family" values. The new assistant secretary of homeland security at the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is 36-year-old Julie Myers, a niece of former Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman Richard Myers and the wife of Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff's chief of staff, John Wood. While Congress has mandated that ICE nominees have a minimum of five years of experience in both management and law enforcement, Myers' past experience includes two years as a federal prosecutor and four years of short stints in the Commerce, Treasury and Justice Departments.

appall-o-meter

1.4 Minnesotans For Nosferatu

If elected, I will boost education spending, protect family farmers, pull our National Guard troops out of Iraq and impale miscreants on the State Capitol lawn. Yep, it's gubernatorial campaign season in Minnesota.

Down the trail blazed by Jesse "The Body" Ventura comes Jonathon "The Impaler" Sharkey, candidate of the Vampyres, Witches and Pagans Party. To give Sharkey his due, he's sharper than your ordinary nut. "Unlike other candidates," he quipped, "I'm not going to hide my evil side."

His outrageous style has made Sharkey a media darling, but according to WCCO-TV, it's gotten his girlfriend in dutch with her employer. Julie Carpenter, a school bus driver in the town of Princeton, was yanked from her duties after Sharkey revealed to the *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* that he sometimes drinks Carpenter's blood. School officials in Princeton also claimed Carpenter told people at the bus garage that she is a witch. Sharkey maintains that she is merely a pagan.

Just another case of small town authorities failing to understand an alternative lifestyle. "Just because I bite somebody, it doesn't make them a vampire," Sharkey

said. "It doesn't make them evil, and they're not going to be like—hiss-s-s!—all over the place. I mean, let's be real here."

2.0 Deck the Halls with Unborn Babies

Attention red state home-makers: Plastic facsimiles of fetuses make wonderful holiday theme decorations! So cute, and positively radiating cheer. Lorinda Hartzler, co-owner of Body Boutique, a women's gym in Lawrence, Kansas, thrilled her patrons with a Christmas tree bedecked with the cute little tykes in pink and blue stockings. Each bore a little card identifying the humanoid forms as being "between 11 and 12 weeks old." Also on the tree were coupons for videos of abortion procedures and brochures explaining the evils of the morning-after pill.

Sure, a few Scrooges at the club made a big deal of their hatred of Yuletide. According to KMBC-TV in Kansas City, some even resigned their membership in protest. What are you gonna do? Some people just don't get Christmas. "It's not like the babies are morbid," Hartzler



protested. "I didn't want to offend anyone."

4.2 God Damn Dirty Apes

In 1926, as the Scopes "Monkey" verdict was making its way to an appeal in the Tennessee Supreme Court, on the other side of the globe a prominent Russian animal breeder was busy trying to create the "Planet of the Apes."

According to the *Scotsman* newspaper, recently declassified documents reveal that Josef Stalin was obsessed with the idea of creating a "living war machine." Scientist Ilya Ivanov was tasked with creating a race of warriors that would be "insensitive to pain, resistant and indifferent about the quality of food they eat."

So Ivanov set out to Africa to inseminate chimpanzees with human sperm. Having failed to put half-human buns in chimpanzees, Ivanov returned to the Soviet Union, chimp ejaculate in tow, to try the experiment in reverse. Stalin was not chuffed with the results. Ivanov was sent to internal exile, where he died a few years later.

—Dave Mulcahey

None of the jobs pertained to immigration, or, more important, offered her experience managing an office with 20,000 employees and a \$4 billion budget.

Her lack of credentials became even too much for right-wing screedstress Michelle Malkin, who decried the choice of Myers in an article titled, "No More Cronyism: Bush DHS Nominee Doesn't Deserve the Job."

—Nick Burt

Hamas: Sharon's Legacy?

BOTH THE ISRAELI and Palestinian political arenas are in turmoil. In Israel, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's stroke has left the country and his newly established party, Kadima, in disarray. In the Palestinian territories, the ruling Fatah party is rapidly losing popular support, and the Islamist party Hamas is gaining ground. Paradoxically, Hamas' steady ascent is part of Sharon legacy, while its imminent victory in the upcoming elections will help Israel's new leader transform Sharon's political vision into reality.

Sharon, the father of Israel's unruly settlement enterprise and the person responsible for thousands of deaths in the Lebanon debacle, including the Sabra and Shatila massacre, altered his strategic thinking during the last couple of years. After leading Israel's efforts to expropriate Palestinian land for three decades, Sharon finally realized that as the messianic and militaristic visions of a greater Israel became reality and the border between Israel proper and the territories it occupied in 1967 was erased, the very idea of a Jewish state, where Jews are the majority, was being "threatened." While he considered the annexation of the West Bank and Gaza appealing from a geographic point of view, he joined the vast majority of Israeli Jews who feel endangered by the fact that today the majority of people living between the Jordan Valley and the Mediterranean Sea are not Jewish.

For years this demographic "threat" was kept at bay by denying the occupied Palestinians Israeli citizenship and subjecting them to military rule. Israel, in other words, created an apartheid regime in the West Bank (and Gaza) in order to sustain the Jewish majority within its borders. It installed dual legal systems within a single

territory, one for Jews, the other for Palestinians. This incongruence between Israel's geographic aspirations and demographic reality led to a political juncture whereby it had to choose one of two options: continue maintaining a system of apartheid or, conversely, give up the idea of a Jewish state.

Sharon decided to adopt a third way. He withdrew from the Gaza Strip and made plans to annex several parts of the West Bank so as to radically alter the region's demographic and geographic reality. He used the separation barrier—which is made up of electronic fences, barbed wire, patrol roads, trenches and massive concrete slates—as the means to unilaterally implement his political vision. Thus, even though the barrier is constantly presented as a "temporary" security apparatus, in reality its primary objective is to redraw the map between Israel and the Palestinian entity.

Demographically, the barrier will surround 56 Jewish settlements from the east, annexing the land that they now occupy so that 171,000 West Bank settlers will be incorporated into Israel's new borders. The wall being built in East Jerusalem is meant to reinforce the 1967 annexation of this part of the city, and to legitimize the 183,800 Jewish settlers living there. If the barrier does indeed become the new border it will solve the problem posed by about 87 percent of Israel's illegal settlers. The remaining 13 percent, or 52,500 settlers, will have to be forcibly evacuated, like the Jewish settlers in the Gaza Strip.

Geographically, the barrier is meant to enlarge Israel's internationally recognized territory by annexing West Bank land, while creating self-governing enclaves for the Palestinians. The barrier's route cuts up the Palestinian territory into 16 small internal enclaves containing specific villages, towns or cities. In addition, it cuts the West Bank in at least two (north/south) and perhaps four larger enclaves (the north is divided into three parts, north of Ariel, south of Ariel and south of Jericho). Taking the Gaza Strip into account, it becomes clear that when the barrier is complete, the future Palestinian "state" will be made up of three to five main regions.



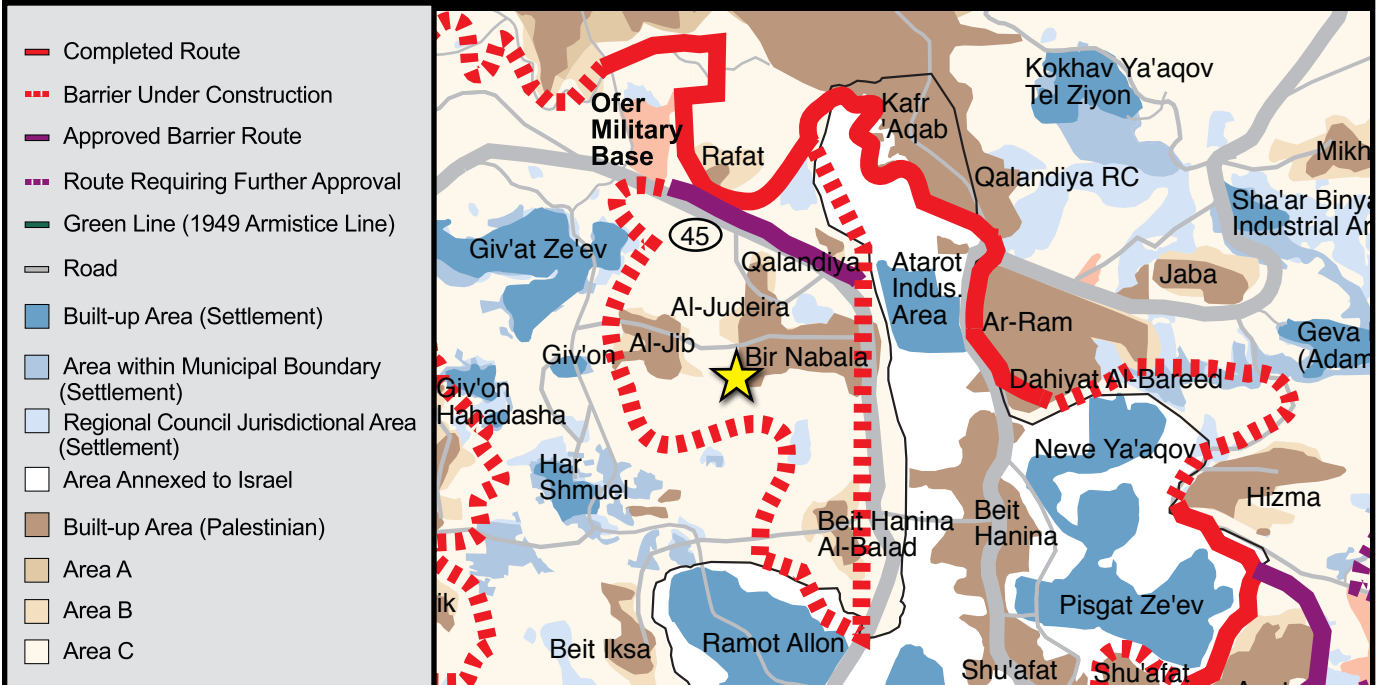
Campaign posters for the January 25 elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council on a wall in Hebron.

The regions will be closed off almost completely from each other, while Israel will continue to effectively control all of the borders so that it can implement a hermetic closure whenever it wishes. What is new about the barrier is not the attempt to create enclaves in the Occupied Territories, but the effort to transform these enclaves into quasi-independent entities that will ostensibly form a Palestinian state.

It is not surprising that Sharon's unilateral solution has in the past two years been sowing the seeds of hatred. One would expect the international community to condemn Israel's myopic unilateralism. Yet now more than before there is a good chance that once Sharon's successors try to secure international approval for his program they will receive widespread support, since in the struggle against Islamic fundamentalism, everything is permitted.

This is where Hamas enters the picture. Hamas, an abbreviation of *Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya*, namely, Islamic Resistance Movement, was founded in 1987 by Sheik Ahmad Yasin at the outbreak of the first Palestinian Intifada. While Hamas tends to be identified with its military arm, Izzeddin al-Qassam, well known for its attacks on Israeli targets, it has always also been a vibrant political and social movement. It has kindergartens and schools that offer free meals for children, education centers for women, and youth and sports clubs. Its medical clinics offer subsidized treatment to the sick and it extends financial and technical assistance to those whose homes had been demolished and to refugees living in sub-standard conditions. Thus, ever

THE SEPARATION BARRIER IN THE WEST BANK



★ **The Bir Nabala enclave, located north of Jerusalem, is comprised of five Palestinian villages and is home to 14,000 people. Bir Nabala is one of sixteen such enclaves slated to be surrounded entirely by Israel's separation barrier, denoted here by a dashed red line. For detailed maps of the entire barrier, visit btselem.org.**

COURTESY OF BT'SELEM

since its establishment, Hamas has offered Palestinians extensive community services and has responded constantly to the changing political reality by making pragmatic decisions.

The changing power relations within Palestinian society, in which the ruling Fatah party has lost many of its sup-

porters to Hamas, will no doubt help Israel advance its unilateral solution. As *In These Times* went to press, it seemed highly likely that Hamas would become the largest party in the Palestinian territories in the January 25 elections, if not winning them outright. This will benefit Sharon's heir, since it will help him con-

vince not only the United States but also Europe to back Israel's intent to establish new borders, turning a blind eye to the ongoing violation of Palestinian rights that Israel's unilateral action entails. Ultimately, this will leave the Palestinians both rightless and stateless.

Sharon, a brilliant strategist, seems to have recognized this long ago, and over the years implemented policies that have strengthened Hamas. The International Crisis Group has shown, for example, that Hamas has been empowered by the economic calamity caused by Israeli assaults and closures. The resulting economic disaster created a gap that Hamas' charitable organizations could fill and the Palestinian Authority could not. Thanks to Sharon's military and economic policies in the Occupied Territories, practically all doors have been closed except, of course, the mosque doors.

Sharon's actions during his tenure as prime minister strengthened Hamas, while Hamas' ascendancy in the Palestinian street will ultimately enable Sharon's followers to pursue his plans unhindered.

—Neve Gordon



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BY REP. BARNEY FRANK (D-MASS.)

The Republicans' Democracy Disorder



THE HOUSE OF Representatives is the only part of the American government where the principle of one person, one vote obtains.

But the Republicans have been running the House in a way that purposefully abuses this principle. They have found a way to shelter many of their members from taking positions that they know to be unpopular with voters. To counter this short-circuiting of democracy, I and three Democratic colleagues have proposed a package of reforms, "Amending the Rules of the House to Protect the Integrity of the Institution."

Our goal is to allow the House of Representatives to create public policy that is democratically sustainable. Representative democracy is being thwarted by current Republican practice. The Republican leadership has gotten very good at holding roll call votes open and marshalling its troops. This gives them the ability to win by changing only as many votes as they need to pass legislation, thereby allowing some Republican members of Congress who support this ruse to vote against the legislation. Their purpose is to let Republican members hide from the public, so that they can give their constituents an impression that is contrary to where they really stand. That allows members to boast about how they voted against the Republican leadership 40, 50, 60, 70 percent of the time, when in fact they voted with the Republican leadership 100 percent of the time when they were needed.

The last time we had a scare of an airplane going over the Capitol and we had to evacuate, we were in the midst of a roll call vote. Every member exited, waited to receive word that it was safe and then returned to continue the vote. That roll call was still concluded in less time than the roll call on prescription drugs. But that's only one example.

In our attempt to reform and provide oversight of the Government Sponsored Enterprises of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, we had a proposal to take 5 percent of the after-tax profits and put it into affordable housing. The conservatives on the Financial Services Committee moved to strike that provision and they lost 53-17. They then got the Republican leadership not to strike it, but to impose outrageous restrictions so that radical groups like the Catholic Church could not participate in providing

such housing and that groups that did provide it could not do any voter registration. They knew that would fail if it was voted on, so they put that into a manager's amendment that had many other things in it that were appealing to people, including a preference for the hurricane victims. Even then the Republican leadership wouldn't allow a vote on it.

All we were asking for was a vote. But they knew that if we had voted on that provision, they would have lost. Under the proposal we've made, I as a ranking member of the committee could have said, "I want a vote on this."

And that's why we have introduced this proposal to try to vindicate democracy, particularly the principle that constituents ought to know how their representatives are voting. Rep. Tom Allen (D-Maine), one of my

co-sponsors, put it this way: "As with the adage that absolute power corrupts absolutely, the centralization of authority in the House of Representatives has come at a disastrous cost for democracy, decency and the public interest. The public has awoken to the folly of current leaders' practice of passing bills only with a majority

of the majority. The result is votes held open for hours to allow for vote buying; huge bills, with nefarious special interest riders attached, rushed to the floor after midnight so Members and the public can't read them; budget rules routinely waived to permit deficit-adding tax cuts. It's time to put the people's voice back into the People's House."

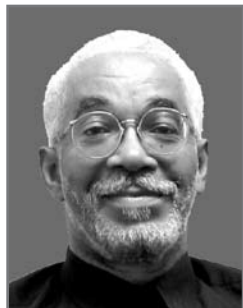
The Republicans are bulimic when it comes to democracy in the House. It causes them serious digestive unrest and the reason is—this is not an abstraction—that they are pushing public policies that they understand to be unpopular. In some cases, that could be courageous if you are standing up for something that is right and just but not publicly popular. However, in general, it is wrong to have a set of procedures that musters majorities of the House of Representatives on unpopular issues by allowing the members to hide behind various rules and procedures so that their constituents don't know what they are really doing.

The United States is now trying to instruct the people of Iraq and Afghanistan in democracy. We have helped to form legislative bodies. But if they get C-SPAN in Iraq and Afghanistan, we should have a line running across the bottom of the screen that warns, "Please do not try this at home." ■

The Republicans are bulimic when it comes to democracy in the House. It causes them serious digestive unrest.

BY SALIM MUWAKKIL

Why Black History Month Matters



WHILE READING AN interesting story in the *New York Observer* about the overwhelming whiteness of the magazine industry, I noticed the prevalence of the phrase “people of color.” This term has become ubiquitous among progressives as an inclusive nomenclature for non-white people. Ironically, it’s a variation of the now discredited term “colored people,” once used to identify African Americans.

These days, of course, a person of color could be anyone of non-European stock. Were magazines inspired to take affirmative action and employ more people of color, they could end up with not a single African American on staff.

On one level, this blurring of affirmative action categories may seem to be a good thing—a merging of difference. But in real world America, this practice has allowed us to postpone addressing the lengthening legacy of our racist past and provides another example

of why Black History Month still matters.

African Americans, as a distinct ethnic variation in the African diaspora, were created by slavery. Millions of Africans wound up in America only because they were kidnapped to fill the needs of a slave economy. This process forged a new people, who became American by necessity, and included 12 generations of chattel slavery. For nearly 250 years, American culture dehumanized those it enslaved and, more insidiously, socialized generations of African Americans for enslavement. The nation’s economic reliance on slavery mandated a rigid and pitiless racial hierarchy.

The century of official Jim Crow segregation that followed slavery’s abolition did little to end African Americans’ social isolation or alter reigning cultural biases. Because of this unrelenting social hostility, the hyphen that connects African to American connotes dueling as well as dual identities. Slavery’s damaging legacy includes the social implications of that internal duel.

A thorough examination of this history would help clarify how the past influences our present of African-American disparity. Affirmative action is a compensatory program designed to begin that process. By blurring people of color into one mass, those complicated historical distinctions get lost.

President Lyndon Johnson zeroed in on the program’s focus in a famous 1965 speech at Howard University. “You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by

chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say, ‘you are free to compete with all the others,’ and still justly believe that you have been completely fair.” Johnson made this speech urging affirmative action a year after passage of the Civil Rights Bill had done little to weaken resistance to equal employment.

But since many Americans lacked a perspective informed by blacks’ peculiar history, other groups had to be included to gain political support for affirmative action. Instead of a program focused on the descendants of enslaved Africans, as originally designed, affirmative action became a comprehensive attempt to offset discrimination against all “minorities”—a term so fuzzy, it includes even white women.

Any program seeking broad remedies for unfair biases is worthy, but the original rationale for affirmative action was much narrower and justified by African Americans’ unique history. Black History Month is an outgrowth of Negro

History Week, established by black historian Carter G. Woodson in 1926. He designated the second week in February to mark the birthdays of both Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln. The week

Some critics contend Black History Month is irrelevant because it has degenerated into a shallow ritual.

was expanded to a month in 1976, as part of the nation’s Bicentennial commemoration. The intent was to feature the racial aspects of our common history.

Some critics argue that sanctioning a racially distinct observation moves Americans away from a common history. African-American actor Morgan Freeman expressed this sentiment in a recent interview on CBS’ “60 Minutes” when he said it was “ridiculous” to have a month dedicated to black history. “I don’t want a black history month,” he said. Freeman’s objection is common, although not often expressed by African Americans—at least not publicly. I have no hard poll numbers, but I suspect most black Americans feel the monthly observation has symbolic importance, even if it has little practical application.

Some critics contend Black History Month is irrelevant because it has degenerated into a shallow ritual. But that problem is one of execution not design. If treated seriously, the monthly observation could conceivably trigger more concern for the accuracy of traditional school curricula.

In fact, that already has happened in Philadelphia where, starting this September, public school students will be required to pass a course in African-American history before they can graduate. Knowledge of that formative history is so essential to understanding the nation’s character, we should utilize all public institutions to ensure all Americans know from whence they came. ■

BY SUSAN J. DOUGLAS

Let Them Eat Crap



BEGIN ON THE sixth floor, third room from the end, swathed in fluorescence: a 60-year-old woman was having two toes sawed off.” So opened the *New York Times*’ four-part series in early January, “Bad Blood,” about the Type 2 diabetes epidemic in New York City. Type 2 diabetes is caused by excess weight, lack of exercise and poor diet, and is directly related to poverty.

The series reminded one that poverty has a map. Indeed, even if you did not

read every word of “Bad Blood”—each story started on the front page and took up two full pages inside—eye-catching illustrations showed the dividing line between poverty and wealth (96th Street on the Upper East Side) and the fast food gauntlet on the main streets in Flushing, which pulls in recent Asian immigrants who pick up diabetes along with the burger and fries.

Diabetes is the leading cause of blindness and kidney failure in the country; it often leads to amputation. It’s the sixth leading cause of death in the United States and costs us \$132 billion a year. And it’s preventable, save for the enormous financial interests involved in its preservation. “Bad Blood” brought together three American scandals—poverty, our morally bankrupt for-profit health care system and the practices of our nation’s fast food joints.

Combined, they make up an illness-industrial complex, in which big players in the food industry, insurance industry and medical establishment profit wildly. But they need more raw materials to keep them going, more fodder for their assembly lines. Poor people of color are that fodder, and very few of the rest of America seems to care.

Remember the summer of 2002 when a lawyer filed suit against McDonald’s and other fast food restaurants? His two teenage clients, one 5-foot-6 and 270 pounds, the other 4-feet-10 and 140 pounds, routinely ate fast food and were diabetic. He charged that McDonald’s did not provide easy-to-understand nutritional information about its fast food, nor disclose that additives made its food less healthy than represented in its ads. The suit immediately became a laughingstock: how preposterous to hold McDonald’s accountable for your own overeating! The National Restaurant Association, however, was far from amused.

The *Times*’ main point is that Type 2 diabetes is an epidemic that promises to grow widely. But its consequences

are seriously underappreciated because the disease’s victims are disproportionately poor people of color. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention project that one in three children—one in three!—born five years ago will become diabetic sometime in their lives. But this will be unequally distributed. The *Times* showed that below 96th Street on the Upper East Side, with a median income of \$75,000 and a poverty rate of 6.2 percent, only 1 percent of the population has diabetes. Up in Spanish Harlem, where the median income is \$20,000 and the poverty rate 38.2 percent, 16 percent have diabetes.

There’s just something about this that seems, well, like a business plan. Budget cuts have simultaneously forced schools to eliminate P.E. classes and make up for lost revenue

by installing Coke and candy machines in the halls. The food industry spends \$10 billion a year marketing foods to kids, and we’re not talking carrots and celery. Clustered in poor neighborhoods, fast food joints continue to hawk

64 oz. sodas and items like Burger King’s Enormous Omelet Sandwich (730 calories, 47 grams of fat). Once poor folk are fattened for the kill, the insurance companies step in. According to the *Times*, health care providers make a profit when they amputate a limb or provide a prosthetic, but lose money if they seek to prevent blindness or provide nutritional advice.

Because this sickening cycle is *only* the result of individual (not industrial) greed, in October the House of Representatives passed, by a 306-120 vote, the “Personal Responsibility in Food Consumption Act” (a.k.a., the “cheeseburger bill”), which would protect the food industry from obesity-related lawsuits. Kentucky Republican Mitch McConnell’s companion “Commonsense Consumption Act,” awaits action in the Senate. Already 20 states have enacted their own versions of “commonsense consumption” laws. Guess who wrote them? Lobbyists for the food industry.

According to Melanie Warner, writing in the *Times*’ business pages, the National Restaurant Association, with headquarters in Washington and 50 state organizations, has led the individual responsibility campaign, dispatching restaurant owners and food executives to the statehouses and Congress. In the last two congressional elections, the food and restaurant industry gave a total of \$5.5 million to politicians in the 20 states that have passed laws shielding companies from obesity liability.

The illness-industrial complex is betting that they will get away with this. That’s what the tobacco companies thought too. ■

Because its victims are mostly poor, the Type 2 diabetes epidemic has been largely ignored.

THE FIRST STONE

BY JOEL BLEIFUSS

FBI, DoD, NSA: All Spying on You



QUIETLY, THE WAR ON terror, in which everything is permitted, has laid the ground work for the Bush administration to intrude into the political life of citizens.

Over the last several months, it has been revealed that the FBI, the

Pentagon and the National Security Agency have each set up apparently independent covert operations to monitor the constitutionally protected political activities of citizens opposed to the Bush administration's war in Iraq.

The *Washington Post* discovered that under authority granted by the U.S. Patriot Act, the FBI has been issuing what are known as "national Security letters" that allow the bureau to spy on U.S. residents. The November 6 *Post* reported, "The FBI has issued tens of thousands of national security letters, extending the bureau's reach as never before into the telephone calls, correspondence and financial lives of ordinary Americans. Most of the U.S. residents and citizens whose records were screened, the FBI acknowledged, were not suspected of wrongdoing."

According to records obtained by the ACLU under a Freedom Of Information Act request, the FBI's targets included people involved in a "vegan community project" in Indianapolis, the Catholic Worker movement and its "semi-communistic ideology," Code Pink, the anti-war coalition United for Peace and Justice, Greenpeace and attendees of the Third National Organizing Conference on Iraq, which was held at Stanford University in May 2005. According to the documents, in some cases the FBI received information about those under surveillance from informers within the targeted groups.

Over at the Pentagon, the Counterintelligence Field Activity (CIFA) office, which was established in 2002, now employs more than 1,000 people. According to the *Washington Post*, CIFA has what the military calls "tasking authority" over the 4,000 people who work in Army, Navy and Air Force intelligence units. What CIFA does is not exactly clear, but in December, NBC reported it had "obtained a secret Pentagon database that indicates the U.S. military is collecting information on American peace activists and monitoring protests against the Iraq war." A document stamped "secret" reports, "We have noted increased communication between protest groups using the Internet," but not a "significant connection" between incidents, such as "recurring instigators" or "vehicle descriptions," which suggests the Pentagon has been monitoring e-mail and tracking anti-war activists by the cars they drive. The document is 400 pages long and lists 1,500 "suspicious incidents across the country over a 10-month period," including "four dozen anti-war meetings or protests, including one in Hollywood." Other groups targeted included The Truth Project, a Quaker group in Lake Worth, Fla., concerned about military recruitment in high schools, and a group at the University of California, Santa Cruz, protesting recruiters on campus.

Christopher Plye, a former Army intelligence officer who exposed Pentagon infiltration of the anti-war and civil rights movements during the Vietnam War, told NBC, "This is the J. Edgar Hoover Memorial Vacuum Cleaner. They're collecting everything."

And then there is President George W. Bush's secret presidential order that gave the National Security Agency (NSA) permission to monitor the international e-mail and phone calls of thousands of people inside the United

States. The story was broken by *New York Times* reporter James Risen, who features Bush's decision to grant NSA authority to spy on Americans in his new book, *State of War*. He writes, "For the first time since the Watergate-era abuses, the NSA is spying on Americans again, and on a large scale. The Bush administration has swept aside nearly 30 years of rules and regulations and has secretly brought the NSA back into the business of domestic espionage."

And we have been down that road before: The FBI's surveillance of Martin Luther King, infiltration of the anti-Vietnam war and civil rights movements by federal agent provocateurs, three incidents of NSA spying, and, in 1972, Watergate, a covert operation that involved agents of the Nixon administration breaking into Democratic Party headquarters.

Responding to the resulting public outcry, Congress passed the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) of 1978 that established the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court. The FISA court operates out of the Justice Department and approves administration requests for wiretaps by the NSA of people in the United States. It was this court that Bush circumvented when he secretly authorized NSA wiretaps.

These covert operations are a sign that the neoconservatives who set administration policy have adopted the policy of victory over all opponents by any means. (Or, as Senior Editor Kurt Vonnegut says, "Neoconservatism is entitlement to whatever is undefended at home or abroad.")

As a result, we now have a government that doesn't respect basic rules of constitutional government. Or, to put it another way, our government has redefined the Constitution in such a way as to justify its actions—and to provide legal protection for those who violate what used to be constitutional rights.

As with the war in Iraq, all of this has some people in the intelligence community worried. Hence, the leaks.

In his new book, Risen explains that his sources with knowledge of the NSA operation became whistle-blowers because they believed “that an investigation should be launched into the way the Bush administration has turned the intelligence community’s most powerful tools against the American people.”

And, as in the war with Iraq, the Bush administration strenuously justifies its actions, giving no quarter.

The administration provides two reasons why circumventing FISA and expanding the authority of NSA to spy within the United States was needed.

First, they argue that FISA courts were not adequate. But James Bamford, the foremost civilian authority on the NSA and author of two books, *Body of Secrets* and *The Puzzle Palace*, disagrees: “The FISA court is as big a rubber stamp as you can possibly get within the federal judiciary.” Indeed, from 1979 through 2004, the NSA granted 18,761 warrants and rejected five. In 2004, 1,754 warrants were approved.

He told the *Baltimore Sun*, “Most of the people I’ve dealt with there had no idea this was going on, and they were very shocked and disappointed that suddenly they’re back to where they were 30 years

ago, dealing with questions of domestic spying. ... The eventual outcome will be a special prosecutor. ... Of course it’s an impeachable offense.”

Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney and others in the administration excuse their snooping by saying it could prevent future 9/11s. On December 17, when Bush confessed that he had expanded NSA’s authority, he cited two of the hijackers who flew the jet into the Pentagon and who had phoned fellow members of Al Qaeda in Yemen while in the United States. He said, “But we didn’t know they were here until it was too late. The authorization I gave the National Security Agency after September 11 helped address that problem.” Cheney repeated this talking point on January 4, in a talk to the Heritage Foundation.

Like so many other Bush administration assertions used to justify policy, like those that got us into a war in Iraq, this one is false. And as with the war in Iraq, the canard has been exposed by patriots in the spy business.

Prior to 9/11, the NSA was already monitoring the number they phoned in Yemen and had the administration wanted to monitor calls in the United States, it could have easily gotten permission to do so from the FISA court.

A senior counter-terrorism official, speaking on the condition of anonym-

ity, told the *Los Angeles Times*, “The NSA was well aware of how hot the number was ... and how it was a logistical hub for Al Qaeda and it was also calling the number in America half a dozen times after the [U.S.S.] Cole [was attacked] and before September 11.” Another official told the paper, “It’s total hubris ... It’s arrogance by the people doing this. This is a 24-hour thing, and you can get these kind of warrants immediately. I think they are just being lazy.”

Eleanor Hill, a former Pentagon inspector general and the staff director of the joint congressional inquiry into 9/11, said that members of Congress had repeatedly asked the administration to recommend reforms of FISA. “The question was always asked of these witnesses: ‘What do you need?’ ... There was plenty of time to raise this issue. You don’t just take it upon yourself to circumvent FISA. That attitude ignores the absolutely critical need for oversight.”

Yet the trump administration’s trump card remains: terrorism. “This authorization is a vital toll in our war against the terrorists,” said Bush.

The very terrifying nature of terrorism turns those who question the Bush wars on into enemies of the state. It is a message so powerful, that even those opposed to the administration can internalize it. As Angela Y. Davis observes in *Abolition Democracy*, which is excerpted on page 59

Simple political discourse à la Bush may not be so much a sign of the lack of presidential intelligence as it is a strategically important way to garner support for global war. What it does is disarm people. It belittles our critical capacities. It invites us to forget about criticism. I think this is one of the reasons why so many people, including progressive and radical people, in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, could not mobilize the moral resources to speak out against Bush.

A similar dynamic seems to be playing out with the domestic spying scandals. Surveillance of potential terrorists is necessary, therefore our rights take second place.

The administration makes no bones about this. Air Force Gen. Michael Hayden, as head of NSA, testified to Congress in 2002 that he met with his staff after 9/11: “I told them that free people always had to decide where to draw the line between their liberty and their security.” Today, Hayden is the Principal Deputy Director of National Intelligence. ■



2005 wasn't a very good year for Lady Liberty. The FBI has been spying on Code Pink, whose members protested at the 2004 Democratic National Convention.

ROBYN BECK/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Walking to Guantánamo

Peace marchers aim to keep the abuse of 'enemy combatants' visible

BY FRIDA BERRIGAN

IT WAS TOUGH GETTING used to being a spectacle, but that is exactly what we were—a motley gaggle of gringos walking through Cuba in short pants and matching gray T-shirts that read “Witness Against Torture: A March to Visit the Prisoners at Guantánamo.” Wearing straw hats and sunglasses, we trailed clouds of sunscreen and bug spray.

Our journey did not start on a Cuban road. We had met and prepared for months to get to this point. Our conversations started as an exploration of ways to resist the “war on terrorism” and respond to the suffering of its victims—and ways to do that as Christians in the tradition of the Catholic Worker movement. Dorothy Day, one of its founders, is famous for having called privileged Catholics out of their church pews and into the streets, where they put the works of mercy—feeding the hungry, housing the homeless, visiting the prisoners—into action. Day also emphasized resisting what she called the “filthy rotten system” of war and injustice that keeps people poor and homeless.

When men imprisoned at Guantánamo Bay Naval Station went on a hunger strike this summer, we knew what to do: walk from Santiago—Cuba’s second largest city—to the U.S. base with the intention of visiting the prisoners. We figured we were only taking up an invitation President Bush made to European Union leaders last year in response to allegations of torture and human rights abuses there. “You’re welcome to go down yourselves ... and tak[e] a look at the conditions,” Bush said.

By walking, we would deal transparently and openly with the Cu-

ban government and we would draw strength from the rich history of non-violent marches for social and political change—from Gandhi’s salt march to the Selma-Montgomery March to the Continental Peace March.

Of course, it was illegal for us to go to Cuba and Cubans themselves cannot march in protest without permission from their government. But it is no coincidence that the torture and abuse at the U.S. prison camp are hidden in a far corner of a foreign territory. The site was chosen with the cynical expectation that the prisoners would be beyond the reach of international law and investigation. Behind borders, and fences and oceans, their suffering would also be muted and

remote. So, we went.

Our walk began in Santiago de Cuba on December 7 and over five days we walked about 70 miles, camping on the side of the road at night. Sometimes we walked in silence, meditating on the stories of prisoners in Guantánamo. I walked, thinking about Mohamed and Murat.

Mohamed el Gharani was 14 when he was arrested in an October 2001 raid on a religious school in Pakistan. Transferred to Guantánamo a few months later, he was subjected to routine and terrible abuse. According to his lawyer, Clive Stafford Smith, the Chad-born teenager had been singled out for mistreatment because he vocally objected



The march to Guantánamo

COURTESY OF SCOTT LANGLEY

to being called “nigger.” Mohamed is not the only juvenile imprisoned at Guantánamo Bay. Eight more teenagers are detained and five others have been released.

Murat Kurnaz was born to a Turkish family in Bremen, Germany. After September 11, 2001, he traveled to learn more about Islam in Pakistan, where he was arrested. He was eventually sent to Guantánamo where he remains in legal limbo. As the son of “guest-workers,” Kurnaz does not have German citizenship, even though he was born there. For a long time, Turkish officials maintained that Kurnaz was German and not their problem. Even after conceding their responsibility, Ankara has not pressured Washington to release Kurnaz. His mother begs “for a sign that my son is alive, that he is being treated justly, that he has not been tortured.”

After reflecting on the nightmares Mohammed and Murat have lived for more than four years now, I would resurface to marvel at the beauty of the countryside. As we walked, Cubans shared greetings, encouragement and most often incredulous exclamations like “a Guantánamo, caminando? A pied? Es bien lejos!” “Walking to Guantánamo? On foot? It is really far!”

On Sunday, December 11, after a long day’s walk on a busy road, we came to La Glorieta, a dusty little town near the end of our journey—the Cuban military checkpoint. The road forked and we were not sure which way to go. To the right, we could see the road blocked by a gate guarded by uniformed men. With Cuban television cameras rolling and the whole town out to watch us go by, we regrouped, forming two lines for our walk to the checkpoint.

I tried to be solemn as we approached the gate, but it seemed rude not to acknowledge all the people who had gathered. But as we got closer, I grew more serious. We planned to make a formal request to the Cuban military to be allowed to proceed through their checkpoint to the military territory it protected so we could hold our vigil closer to the American security perimeter.

It was an enormous and improbable request. The U.S. base at Guantánamo is a source of anger and fear for the Cuban people and their government. The United States annexed the 45-square-mile territory during the Spanish-American

War and has held it ever since. Even if the Cuban military allowed us through their gate, there was still a mined no man’s land between us and the American naval base.

As we got closer to the gate to make our formal request, we saw a big sign next to the gate that says “Jao Sal.” It was a salt refining complex, not the military checkpoint. Oops. The serious, intrepid American activists who had come so far had to parade through the whole town again as we tried to find the real military checkpoint.

A half-mile farther down the road, we found a sturdy fence guarded by soldiers, men and women dressed in dark

Our fast was not a hunger strike, but it was long enough that cravings for food turned to actual hunger, and hunger turned into a peculiar light-headedness and clarity. It was long enough to realize that hunger is a violent act against biology, to reflect on the depth of powerlessness and despair—as well as the intensity of will and defiance—that informs the decision to fast to death. The authorities at Guantánamo reported that on Christmas the number of men refusing to eat had doubled to 84.

Our principal aim in going to Guantánamo—walking, vigiling and fasting—was to let the prisoners know that they were not alone. Despite the re-

The authorities at Guantánamo Bay reported that on Christmas the number of prisoners refusing to eat as part of a hunger strike protesting their treatment had doubled to 84.

camouflage, their faces hidden below brimmed hats. We walked to the line of soldiers and read out loud an account of the hunger strike at Guantánamo from *The Independent*. We requested entry to address the crimes of our own government. The captain firmly refused to allow us through, but invited us to cross the white line separating civilian and military territory “as a gesture of solidarity with your cause.”

Inside the huge base, which straddles both sides of the Guantánamo bay, is Cuba’s only McDonald’s, a state-of-the-art recreation and sports facilities for American soldiers and their families, two airstrips, and a desalinization plant, because Cuba had cut off the base’s water supply. Somewhere in this far-flung slice of stripmall Americana are Camp Delta, Camp Echo, Camp Iguana and Camp V, where Murat, Mohammed and 500 other men are imprisoned.

We set up our camp along the Cuba fence, five miles from the prison, closer than Mohamed’s father or Murat’s mother have been to their sons in years. The dust and scrub brush next to the fence was our home for the next four days as we prayed and fasted. There, I thought of the scores of men on hunger strike. The only way to draw attention to their plight is to deepen their own suffering.

flexive fear Americans have been inculcated to have toward the so-called “worst of the worst” held in Guantánamo, coverage of our witness in the U.S. press was positive and extensive. Our march and fast received widespread attention in the international press, including Arabic language outlets. All of that, combined with a network of lawyers representing prisoners who brought news of our proximity and solidarity to the men, means they knew we had tried, and are still trying.

While we await notice from the Treasury Department’s Office of Foreign Assets Control, the agency responsible for violations of the ban on travel to Cuba, we will not be idle. On March 1, those of us who marched to Guantánamo are organizing an action in Washington, D.C., to make the prison and its victims visible to those who are responsible for the torture and abuse. We continue to meet and plan, working to build a campaign to close Guantánamo, free those prisoners who are innocent of any crime and bring the United States back into accordance with international law. Join us.—■

FRIDA BERRIGAN, an *In These Times* contributing editor, serves on the Board of the War Resisters League. She lives in Brooklyn.



CAN **BLOGS**

REVOLUTIONIZE PROGRESSIVE
POLITICS?

BY LAKSHMI CHAUDHRY



WE HAVE NO INTEREST in being anti-establishment," says Matt Stoller, a blogger at the popular Web site MyDD.com. "We're going to be the establishment."

That kind of flamboyant confidence has become the hallmark of blog evangelists who believe that blogs promise nothing less than a populist revolution in American politics. In 2006, at least some of that rhetoric is becoming reality. Blogs may not have replaced the Democratic Party establishment, but they are certainly becoming an integral part of it. In the wake of John Kerry's defeat in the 2004 presidential elections, many within the Democratic leadership have embraced blog advocates' plan for political success, which can be summed up in one word: netroots.

This all-encompassing term loosely describes an online grassroots constituency that can be targeted through Internet technologies, including e-mail, message boards, RSS feeds and, of course, blogs, which serve as organizing hubs. In turn, these blogs employ a range of features—discussion boards, Internet donations, live e-chat, social networking tools like MeetUp, online voting—that allow ordinary citizens to participate in politics, be it supporting a candidate or organizing around a policy issue. Compared to traditional media, blogs are faster, cheaper, and most importantly, interactive, enabling a level of voter involvement impossible with television or newspapers.

No wonder, then, that many in Washington are looking to blogs and bloggers to counter the overwhelming financial and ideological muscle of the right—especially in an election year. Just 18 months ago, the *New York Times Magazine* ran a cover story depicting progressive bloggers as a band of unkempt outsiders, thumbing their nose at party leadership. But now, it's the party leaders themselves who are blogging. Not only has Senate Minority leader Harry Reid started his own blog—Give 'em Hell Harry—and a media "war room" to "aggressively pioneer Internet outreach," he's also signed up to be the keynote speaker at the annual conference of the top political blog, Daily Kos.

Stoller predicts that as an organizing tool, "blogs are going to play the role that

talk radio did in 1994, and that church networks did in 2002."

An Internet-fueled victory at the polls would certainly be impressive—no candidate backed by the most popular progressive blogs has yet won an election. But electoral success may merely confirm the value of blogs as an effective organizing tool to conduct politics as usual, cementing the influence of a select group of bloggers who will likely be crowned by the media as the new kingmakers.

Winning an election does not, however, guarantee a radical change in the relations of power. Technology is only as revolutionary as the people who use it, and the progressive blogosphere has thus far remained the realm of the privileged—a weakness that may well prove fatal in the long run.

In 2006, the biggest question facing blogs and bloggers is: Will their ascendancy empower the American people—in the broadest sense of the word—or merely add to the clout of an elite online constituency?

The birth of a revolution

Alienation may not have been the mother of blogging technology, but it most certainly birthed the "political blogosphere." The galvanizing cause for the rapid proliferation of political blogs and their mushrooming audience was a deep disillusionment across the political spectrum with traditional media—a disillusionment accentuated by a polarized political landscape.

In the recent book *Blog! How the Newest Media Revolution Is Changing Politics, Business and Culture*, Web guru Craig Shirky links the rise of political blogs to the sharpening Red/Blue State divide. Both 9/11 and the Iraq war reminded people that "politics was vitally important," and marked the "moment people were looking for some kind of expression outside the bounds of network television," or, for that matter, cable news or the nation's leading newspapers.

Progressives were angry not just with the media but also with Democratic Party leaders for their unwillingness to challenge the Bush administration's case for war. That much-touted liberal rage found its expression on blogs like Eschaton,

Daily Kos and Talking Points Memo, and continues to fuel the phenomenal growth of the progressive blogosphere. Like the rise of right-wing talk radio, this growth is directly linked to an institutional failure of representation. Finding no mirror for their views in the media, a large segment of the American public turned to the Internet to speak for themselves—often with brutal, uncensored candor.

As blogs have grown in popularity—at the rate of more than one new blog per second—they've begun to lose their vanguard edge. The very institutions that political bloggers often criticize have begun to adopt the platform, with corporate executives, media personalities, porn stars, lawyers and PR strategists all jumping into the fray. That may be why Markos Moulitsas Zúñiga, the founder and primary voice of Daily Kos, thinks the word "blog" is beginning to outlive its usefulness. "A blog is merely a publishing tool, and like a tool, it can be used in any number of ways," he says.

But for many, to rephrase director Jean Renoir, a blog is still a state of mind. To their most ardent advocates, blogs are standard-bearers of a core set of democratic values: participation, egalitarianism and transparency. Books like Dan Gillmor's *We the Media*, Howard Rheingold's *Smart Mobs*, James Surowiecki's *The Wisdom of Crowds*, and Joe Trippi's *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised* have become the bibles of progressive politics. Taken together, they express the dream of Internet salvation: harnessing an inherently democratic, interactive and communal medium, with the potential to instantaneously tap into the collective intellectual, political and financial resources of tens of millions of fellow Americans to create a juggernaut for social change.

According to Moulitsas, "The word 'blog' still implies a certain level of citizen involvement, of giving power to someone who is not empowered"—especially to progressives who, according to a study released last year by the New Politics Institute, have overtaken conservatives as the heavyweights of the political blogosphere.

Vox Populi

Political blogs have often been most effective as populist fact-checkers, chal-

a brief history of BLOGS

BY ANNIE ANDERSON

1997

DECEMBER
The term "weblog" was coined by Jorn Barger, editor of the blog Robot Wisdom on December 17.

1999

APRIL/MAY
Peter Merholz, who blogs at peterme.com is the first to use the verb "blog," by dividing the weblog into the words "we blog"..

AUGUST
A tiny company in San Francisco called Pyra Labs creates Blogger. It is the first of the Internet-based, free, and easy-to-use blog-creation tools that will spark the explosive growth of the blogosphere.

DECEMBER
Rusty Foster debuts Scoop. This open source "collaborative media application" allows the readers of a Web site to also produce its content. Markos Moulitsas Zúniga will later use it to transform DailyKos from an individual blog into a mega-community Web site.

2000

NOVEMBER
Freelance journalist Josh Marshall starts TalkingPointsMemo in the midst of the 2000 election recount controversy.

2002

MAY
Moulitsas begins blogging at DailyKos. He is one of the many political bloggers who begin self-publishing in response to 9/11 and the invasion of Iraq.

NOVEMBER
David Sifry founds Technorati, a real-time search engine that tracks what is going on in the blogosphere.

lenging, refuting and correcting perceived errors in news coverage.

"Independent bloggers have challenged the mainstream media and held them accountable, whether it's with Judy Miller or Bob Woodward," says Huffington Post founder Arianna Huffington. The most significant effect of this "we can fact-check your ass" credo has not been merely to put journalists on notice, but to change the way public knowledge is produced on a daily basis. "It's hard now for an important story to hit the front page of the *New York Times* and just die there," says Huffington. A news article is now merely the beginning of a public conversation in the blogosphere, where experts, amateurs and posers alike dissect its merits and add to its information, often keeping it alive long after journalists have moved on.

Popular understanding of what blogs are and what they can do has been muddled by an inevitably hostile relationship between political bloggers and traditional media. Writing in the Dec. 26 issue of *The New Republic*, Franklin Foer took bloggers to task for nursing "an ideological disdain for 'Mainstream Media'—or MSM, as it has derisively (and somewhat adolescently) come to be known." But Foer, like so many traditional journalists who criticize blogs, failed to grasp the very nature of his intended target.

Blogs are literally vox populi—or at the least the voice of the people who post entries and comments, and, to a lesser extent, of their devoted readers. Telling bloggers that they're wrong or to shut up is somewhat like telling respondents to an opinion survey to simply change their mind. When journalists reject bloggers as cranks or wingnuts, they also do the same to a large segment of the American public who see blogs as an expression of their views. Such dismissals feed the very alienation that makes blogs and bloggers popular.

The irony is that bloggers are most powerful when they work in tandem with the very media establishment they despise.

"Bloggers alone cannot create conventional wisdom, cannot make a story break, cannot directly reach the vast population that isn't directly activist and involved in politics," says Peter Daou, who coordinated the Kerry campaign's blog outreach operations. Blogs instead exert an indirect form of power, amplifying and channeling the pressure of netroots opinion upwards to pressure politicians and journalists. "It's really a rising up," says Daou.

Can this online rebellion lead to real political change? The prognosis thus far is encouraging, but far from definitive.

Can the netroots grow the grassroots?

If television made politics more elitist and less substantive, blogs—and more broadly, netroots tools—have the potential to become engines of truly democratic, bottom-up, issue-rich political participation.

Blogs allow rank-and-file voters to pick the candidate to support in any given electoral race, influence his or her platform, and volunteer their time, money and expertise in more targeted and substantive ways. Democratic candidates in the midterm elections are already busy trying to position themselves as the next Howard Dean, vying for a digital stamp of approval that will bring with it free publicity, big money and, just maybe, a whole lot of voters.

When Rep. Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio) decided to take on Iraq veteran Paul Hackett in the Democratic primary for the Senate race in Ohio, he moved quickly to neutralize his opponent's advantage as the unquestioned hero of the progressive bloggers. The ace up Brown's sleeve: Jerome Armstrong, founder of the influential MyDD.com and veteran of Howard Dean's online campaign. Brown's next move was a blog entry on The Huffington Post titled, "Why I am a Progressive."

But not everyone is convinced that blogs can be as influential in a midterm election, when there are a large number of electoral contests spread across the country. "Raising money at a nationwide level for a

special election is one thing,” Pew scholar Michael Cornfield says, “but raising it and developing a core of activists and all the ready-to-respond messages when you have to run hundreds of races simultaneously—which is what will happen in

What is also new in 2006 is the effort to redirect attention from the national to the local. “It’s not just about focusing the national blogosphere on Ohio, but about building from the ground up in Ohio,” Armstrong says. “Over 90 percent of our

We are at the beginning of a comprehensive reformation of the Democratic Party—driven by committed progressive outsiders. Online activism on a nationwide level, coupled with offline activists at the local level ... can provide the formula for a quiet, bloodless coup that can take control of the

An effective netroots strategy in 2006 will have to master the failings of Howard Dean’s campaign, which stalled because it couldn’t grow his support base beyond his online constituency.

2006—is another thing.” Moreover, the ability of the Internet to erase geographical distances can become a structural weakness in elections where district lines and eligibility are key.

An effective netroots strategy in 2006 will also have to master the shortcomings of the Dean’s campaign, which stalled mainly because it failed to grow his support base beyond his online constituency—antiwar, white and high-income voters. In contrast, the Bush/Cheney operation used the Internet to coordinate on-the-ground events such as house parties, and rallies involving church congregations.

Cornfield describes the Republican model as, “one person who is online and is plugged into the blogosphere. That person becomes an e-precinct captain, and is responsible for reaching out offline or any means necessary for ten people.”

This time around, Armstrong is determined to match the GOP’s success. GrowOhio.org, which he describes as “a community blog for Democratic Party activists,” will coordinate field operations for not just Brown but all Democratic candidates in each of Ohio’s 88 counties. Its primary goal is to reach rural voters in areas where the campaign cannot field organizers on the ground.

“This isn’t just about using the net for communications and fundraising, but for field organizing,” Armstrong says.

signups on GrowOhio.org are Ohio activists, and we will soon have Internet outreach coordinators in all 88 counties.”

But many like Daou remain skeptical about the power of blogs to directly impact politics at the grassroots level. “You’re not going to go out there and mobilize a million people and have them all come to the polls and donate money. Blogs will never do that,” he says

And they may be even less effective in areas that are traditionally not as internet-savvy as the rest of the country, be it the rural red states or impoverished inner cities. Creating a virtual “community center” is unlikely to compensate for the Democrats’ disadvantage on the ground. Due to the eroding presence of unions, Democrats no longer possess a physical meeting place where they can target and mobilize voters—unlike Republicans, who rely on a well-organized network of churches, gun clubs and chambers of commerce.

What is clear is that the 2006 elections will test the claim of blog evangelists that online activism can radically transform offline politics—a claim that is central to their far more ambitious vision for the future. In their book *Crashing the Gate* (to be released in April), Moulitsas and Armstrong envision blogs as the centerpiece of a netroots movement to engineer an imminent and sweeping transformation of the Democratic Party:

party. Money and mobilization are the two key elements of all political activity, and if the netroots have their way, the financial backbone of the Democratic Party will be regular people.

Whether a truly decentralized and “leaderless” netroots can function like a political party is debatable, but the latest wave of technological innovation does offer unprecedented opportunities for constructing a progressive movement for the digital age. Such an outreach effort would use the Internet very much like conservatives such as Richard Viguerie used direct mail to build a powerful political force. But in order to craft a genuinely democratic form of politics, the progressive blogosphere will have to overcome its greatest weakness: lack of diversity.

The rise of the bloggerati

In *Newsweek*, Simon Rosenberg, a beltway insider who lost the DNC chair to Dean, described the progressive blogosphere as the new “Resistance” within the Democratic Party, engaged in a civil war to wrest power from a craven and compromised belt-

AUGUST
Democratic hopeful Paul Hackett, running in a special congressional election in Ohio, raises more than \$500,000 in online donations thanks to bloggers.

2005

2003

MARCH
The Oxford English Dictionary includes the words “weblog,” “weblogging” and “weblogger.”

MARCH
Howard Dean creates the first political campaign blog. Initially titled the Dean Call To Action blog, it was renamed Blog for America. It represents the first significant step toward netroots organizing.

2004

JANUARY
Ana Marie Cox launches Wonkette, which dishes D.C. gossip. Wonkette belongs to Gawker Media, an online company founded by Nick Denton and considered to be the most visible and successful blog-oriented media company.

NOVEMBER
John Kerry’s presidential campaign raises \$79.6 million in contributions of \$200 or less largely because of efforts to raise money online. On the final day of the Democratic Convention, Kerry’s online supporters donate \$6 million.

way leadership. According to Rosenberg, the leaders of this “resistance” are the top progressive bloggers, more specifically the most popular and increasingly influential Moulitsas. Rosenberg told the *Washington Monthly*, “Frankly I don’t think there’s anyone who’s had the potential to revolutionize the Democratic Party that Markos does.”

Yet both the progressive blogosphere and the “revolutionaries” who dominate its ranks look a lot like the establishment they seek to overthrow.

The report by the New Politics Institute—which was launched by Rosenberg’s New Democracy Network—notes: “Clearly, blogging is a world with a handful of haves, and a nearly uncountable number of have-nots. There are likely a few hundred thousand blogs in this country that talk about politics, but less

than one-tenth of one percent of them account for more than 99 percent of all political blogging traffic.”

For better or worse, traffic numbers have become an endorsement of the political agenda of specific individuals. While A-list bloggers repeatedly deny receiving any special treatment, the reality is that both the media and political establishment pay disproportionate attention to their views, often treating them as representative of the entire progressive blogosphere.

In a *Foreign Policy* article, political scientists Daniel Drezner and Henry Farrell cheerfully note, “The skewed network of the blogosphere makes it less time-consuming for outside observers to acquire information. The media only need to look at elite blogs to obtain a summary of the distribution of opinions on a given

political issue.” Why? Because the “elite blogs” serve as a filtering mechanism, deciding which information offered up by smaller blogs is useful or noteworthy. In effect, A-list blogs get to decide what issues deserve the attention of journalists and politicians, i.e., the establishment.

The past two years have also marked the emergence of a close relationship between top bloggers and politicians in Washington. A number of them—for example, Jesse Taylor at Pandagon, Tim Tagaris of Swing-StateProject, Stoller and Armstrong—have been hired as campaign consultants. Others act as unofficial advisers to top politicians like Rep. Rahm Emmanuel (D-Ill.), who holds conference calls with preeminent bloggers to talk strategy. When the Senate Democrats invite Moulitsas to offer his personal views on netroots strategy—treating him, as a *Washington Monthly* profile describes, “a kind of part-time sage, an affiliate member”—the perks of success become difficult to deny.

Armstrong sees the rise of the blogger-guru—or “strategic adviser,” as he puts it—as a positive development. Better to hire a blogger who is personally committed to the Democratic cause than a D.C.-based mercenary who makes money irrespective of who wins.

But the fact that nearly all these “advisers” are drawn from a close-knit and mostly homogenous group can make them appear as just a new boys’ club, albeit one with better intentions and more engaged politics. Aside from notable exceptions like Moulitsas, who is part-Salvadoran, and a handful of lesser-known women who belong to group blogs, top progressive bloggers tend to be young, well-educated, middle class, male and white.

Reach, representation and credibility

The lack of diversity is partly a function of the roots of blogging in an equally homogenous tech-geek community. Nevertheless, women and people of color constitute the fastest rising segment of those joining the blogosphere. Feminist and female-authored political blogs like *Feministing*, *Bitch Ph.D.*, *Echidne of the Snakes*, and *Salon’s Broadsheet* made considerable gains in traffic and visibility in 2005, as did *Latino Pundit*, *Culture Kitchen*, and *Afro-Netizen*. Better yet, they’re forging networks and alliances to help each other grow. There is no doubt the membership of the blogosphere is



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changing, and will look very different five years from now. "We're just a step behind, just like any other area," says Pandagon's Amanda Marcotte.

But while the growth of the blogosphere may increase the actual traffic to a greater number of blogs, it also makes visibility far more scarce and precious for each new blogger. As one of the top women bloggers, Chris Nolan, noted on the PressThink blog, "The barrier to entry in this new business isn't getting published; anyone can do that. The barrier to entry is finding an audience."

Elite bloggers can play a key role in generating that audience. As Marcotte points out, "A lot more women are moving up in the Technorati rankings" (Technorati is a search engine for the blogosphere) because A-listers like Duncan Black and Kevin Drum in 2005 made it a priority to promote female bloggers. But when someone like Moulitsas decides to stop linking to other blogs—as he has recently done because he doesn't want to play "gatekeeper"—or when top bloggers repeatedly cite their fellow A-listers, it has enormous consequences. "It's pretty darn hard today to break in to the A-list if the other A-listers aren't linking to you," says Global Voices co-founder Rebecca MacKinnon.

If blogs derive their credibility from being the "voice of the people," surely we should be concerned about which opinions get attention over others. The question of representation affects not just who is blogging—and with great success—but also the audience of these blogs. What kind of democratic consensus does the blogosphere reflect when the people participating in it are most likely to be white, well-educated men?

Yet when it comes to issues of diversity, A-list bloggers like Moulitsas and Stoller can get defensive, and at times, dismissive. "Take a look at what you have today. Take a look at the folks who're leading the party, dominating the media, or even within corporations. Do you think the top ranks of any of those institutions is any more representative?" responds Stoller, his voice rising in indignation.

Where Stoller openly acknowledges the problem—describing blogs in one of his posts as "a new national town square for the white progressive base of the Democratic party"—and the need to take steps to tackle the disparity, Moulitsas is less generous. In his view, it's simply absurd to demand what he sarcastically describes

as an "affirmative action of ideas" within an inherently meritocratic medium such as the blogosphere: "I don't see how you can say, 'Well, let's give more voice to African American lesbians.' Create a blog. If there's an audience, great. If there isn't, not so great." Besides, he suggests, if a Salvadoran war refugee—in his words, a "political nobody"—like him can make it on the Internet, there's nothing stopping anyone else from doing the same.

As for the relative paucity of top female progressive bloggers, Moulitsas is indifferent: "I haven't given it a lot of thought. I find it totally uninteresting. What I'm interested in is winning elections, and I don't give a shit what you look like." It's an odd and somewhat disingenuous response from an advocate of blogging as the ultimate tool of democratic participation.

Keith Jenkins, who authors Good Reputation Sleeping and works a day job as the picture editor at the *Washington Post*, says the low barriers to entry do not in themselves offer a sufficient guarantee of equal participation. "It's less about actively stopping and standing in the way and more about affirmatively enabling access, which was the underlying argument of civil rights movements and freedom movements across the board," he says. "It's about affirmatively making it possible for everybody to have a seat at the table, which benefits not only the people who are sitting down, but also the people who are already seated."

"We need to be encouraging a more

Top to bottom:
Rebecca MacKinnon,
Markos Moulitsas and
Jerome Armstrong.



A Blog for the Other Six Billion of Us

Want to know about the upcoming cricket match between India and China? The recent arrests of human rights activists in Cambodia? Or why Bolivian president Evo Morales wears the same damned sweater for all his international photo-ops? You can find answers to these and other pressing questions on Global Voices, a gateway to the whole, wide virtual world that lies outside the confines of the American blogosphere. A project of the Berkman Center for Internet and Society at the Harvard Law School, the meta-blog is assembled by an international team of "blogger-editors" who serve as guides to conversations taking place on blogs in their corner of the world.

"If as an American you wanted to know what an ordinary Iranian or Bangladeshi or Chinese person thinks about what's happening in their country or their daily life, you had to wait for CNN to interview them or *New York Times* to quote them in an article," says Global Voices co-founder Rebecca MacKinnon. Now all you have to do is point on the country or region of your choice to find someone who can tell you, for example, just why the South African government is cozying up to Iran.

The Web site—which receives 10 to 12 thousand visitors a day—is in large part a response to the myopic reporting that passes for international news coverage in the mainstream media. The kind of reporting that MacKinnon was expected to deliver as the Asia correspondent for CNN USA, a job she quit in 2004. "I was told to cover my region more like a tourist, and that my expertise was getting in the way of doing the kind of story they wanted," she says.

But it's not just the media that are self-absorbed. Global Voices also offers an important corrective to the equally U.S.-centric focus of American political bloggers who seem as likely to forget that there are more pressing issues in this world than who wins what congressional seat in Colorado.

<http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/globalvoices/>

diverse group of people to blog,” agrees Global Voices’ MacKinnon. “But we also need to be linking to them and giving them traffic so that they have a chance to make it to the A-list.”

While the organic growth of the blogosphere may resolve issues of race and gender over time, it will do little to address its overwhelming bias toward urban professionals. And that can’t be good news for a party that is already being punished at the polls for its weak connection to working-

class Americans.

“For me the greatest problem is low-income people,” Cornfield says. “The irony is that it’s not because they don’t have money to get a laptop—especially with the \$100 laptop now. It’s that people who are poor don’t have the civic skill sets and motivation to go online and do these sorts of things. That will take a concerted effort.”

At a time when the visible digital divide may be shrinking as increasing numbers of Americans come online, it may be re-

placed by an invisible version that benefits those who are well-educated, well-connected and organized.

Stoller does not think that it’s important for blogs to reach a less-affluent audience: “Not everybody has to be part of that conversation. If someone wants to have access to those discussions, they should be able to do that. But for the most part, people—like that person working two shifts—will go on with their lives knowing that good people are making good decisions and policies on their behalf.” Bloggers like Moulitsas—who is equally unconcerned that his blog will never reach “someone working at the DMV”—are likely betting that the cadre of activists they reach will be able to form connections across those differences within their community.

Perhaps sites like GrowOhio.org will prove them to be right if it manages to mobilize a constituency—e.g. rural voters—that is least likely to be wired, and in a region where the party’s on-the-ground resources are weak. But any such strategy is unlikely to work if those in charge of crafting it—be they bloggers, politicians or so-called netizens—show little interest in expanding the reach of the progressive blogosphere to include the largest, most diverse audience possible. If the blogs are unable to bridge the class divide online, there is no reason to think they can create a grassroots movement that can do so in the real world.

“If you do make an active effort, it is easier to accomplish through the Internet than through pretty much any other medium including direct mail,” Cornfield says. “But it will not happen on its own. It has to be a concerted effort.” Social movements are built by people not ghosts in some virtual machine.

The *Washington Monthly* profile of Moulitsas included a revealing quote, in which he expressed disappointment at not being able to fulfill his dream of making it big in the tech industry back in 1998: “Maybe at some time, Silicon Valley really was this democratic ideal where the guy with the best idea made a billion dollars, but by the time I got there at least, it was just like anything else—a bunch of rich kids who knew each other running around and it all depended on who you knew.”

The danger is that many may come to feel the same way about the blogosphere in the coming years.—■

LAKSHMI CHAUDHRY is an *In These Times* senior editor.

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IN SEARCH OF SOLIDARITY

BY CHRISTOPHER HAYES

It's a week before the holidays in New York City and there's a transit strike. A strike? In 2005? It seems an anachronism, like meat rations or air raid drills. There's a frisson of excitement in the air mixed with logistical dread and disbelief.

The morning the strike begins, billionaire mayor Mike Bloomberg accuses the largely black and Latino union of acting "thuggishly" and then proceeds to class-bait the transit workers. "You've got people making \$50,000 and \$60,000 a year keeping the people who are making \$20,000 and \$30,000 a year from being able to earn a living," he says. "That's just not acceptable."

This sums up the narrative for nearly all of the local press coverage: scowls of harried commuters waiting in line, shots of the hapless souls trudging across the Brooklyn Bridge, an icon of the city in crisis that evokes both the strange thrill of the '03 blackout and the horror of 9/11; frenzied live reports from the Mad Max death-cage that is Penn Station; and interviews with grimacing truck drivers banned from entering south of 96th street, waiting to catch hell from their bosses. The message: New Yorkers are pissed, as only New Yorkers can be, at the malcontents who left them to fend for themselves amidst the holiday crush. "I wish we still had Reagan," one man says in a typical sound bite. "He would have fired the whole lot of them."

Among liberals—people who loathe Bush, oppose the war, favor national healthcare—there's an ambivalence about the strikers' demands: Who gets to retire at 55 with a half-salary pension? The *New York Times* editorial page calls the strike "unnecessary," the union's account of negotiations "ridiculous," and bellows that TWU Local 100 president Roger Toussaint "should not have the ability to hold the city hostage."

But despite the near-unanimous condemnation by the city's mandarins and negative round-the-clock coverage, New Yorkers, astonishingly, support the strikers.

I get an inkling of this when I walk past an MTA bus depot in East Harlem on the strike's second day. Instead of a riotous mob shouting insults, cars honk approval as they zip past the picketers.



New York City commuters walk across the Brooklyn Bridge during the December 20 morning rush-hour after city transit workers decided to strike for the first time in 25 years.

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Polls commissioned by local news outlets bear this out, though you'd hardly know it from the coverage. One, commissioned by a local ABC affiliate and conducted by Survey USA on the first day of the strike, asked the question: "In the transit strike ... whose side are you on?" *Fifty-two percent* of respondents said the union. Forty percent said the MTA. A poll from local radio station WWRL found that 71 percent of respondents blamed the MTA for the strike and 14 percent blamed the union. A poll by local cable channel NY1 found a majority of New Yorkers thought the union's demands "fair."

The real story of the strike is not the epic hassle it created. It is the fact that despite universal condemnation from opinion makers, millions of New Yorkers were *in solidarity* with the strikers.

Solidarity. Now there's an anachronism. The news media doesn't talk about solidarity; it employs the assured and peppy tone that speaks to the individual consumer: *After the break: We'll tell you how the strike will affect your morning commute.* Solidarity is the opposite of news you can use. No wonder the local media missed the real story. It hinged on a concept that is not part of its vocabulary.

The word "solidarity" may seem the sole provenance of the "left" and the "dying" labor movement, but the strike showed that whether we give it a name or not, people still feel it.

In *Which Side Are You On?*, Tom Geoghegan writes that solidarity is "the only love left in this country that dare not speak its name." Enter the word into Google news and you'll find that in English-language papers from Lahore to Leeds, the word pops up frequently. Not so here. In American publications it appears, if at all, only in neutered form—the simple presence of group cohesion. A company sponsoring a retreat for its employees does so to encourage "corporate solidarity." Bloomberg's appearance on the Brooklyn Bridge on the strike's first morning is described as a "show of solidarity" with stranded commuters.

Yet the word retains a specific moral force. I remember the thrill I felt when I received a correspondence from a union organizer who signed off, "In solidarity." It felt, at once, a generous invitation to fellowship, and a moral call to arms. I took to signing off correspondences with it.

Recently, an editor I respect wrote to tell me that she and another editor had

asked each other: "What the heck is he doing, signing his letter with *that*?" I asked her what was startling about it. Did it seem strange for a journalist to invoke it? Was it contrived? All of the above, she replied. I e-mailed a conservative friend. Should I not have used it? Did he think it strange, offensive? "Definitely not offensive," he wrote back. "Might be a bit silly, but not offensive."

The current state of solidarity in a nutshell: at once too strident and too silly.

Through our blood it runs

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "solidarity" as: "The fact or quality, on the part of communities ... of being perfectly united or at one in some respect, esp. in interests, sympathies, or aspirations." It comes from the same Latin root as "solid" and is adapted from the French *solidarité*, which by the 19th century, had supplanted the "*fraternité*" of the French Revolution as the social glue for the impending era of enlightened utopia. Whereas "brotherhood" relied on personal intimacy and a vestigial Christian conception of fellowship, solidarity was capacious enough to lasso together enormous clusters of strangers, perhaps even all of humanity. It soon became a buzzword. At the 1900 World's Fair, the French minister of trade announced solemnly, "Science reveals to us society's material and ethical secret, which may be summarized in one word—solidarity."

In the mid-19th century, *solidarité* crossed both the English Channel and the Atlantic. Sven-Eric Liedman, a professor of intellectual history at Sweden's Göteborg University, writes that Americans were skeptical of the French import: In 1844, one American complained of "the uncouth French word, *solidarité*, now coming in such use." While the word never quite gained the same cachet it had (and continues to have) in Europe, the American left quickly adopted it. *Solidarity* was the name of an early anarchist journal. Eugene Debs said solidarity was "a fact, cold and impassive as the granite foundations of a skyscraper." And, in 1915, Ralph Chaplin of the Industrial Workers of the World wrote the labor anthem "Solidarity Forever" to the tune of "Battle Hymn of the Republic."

Solidarity in the political vocabulary of the American left became class solidarity, workers' solidarity, the banding together of laborers against bosses. But it possessed more than rhetorical resonance, it was also the foundation of the labor move-

ment's most potent tool: the strike. Only if workers stuck together under incredible pressures—violent intimidation from Pinkerton thugs and national guardsmen with rifles—could a strike be successful. In the 1880s and 1890s, as members of the Knights of Labor struck across the country for an eight-hour day, its motto was: "An injury to one is the concern of all."

Years later, the United Auto Workers, born of a series of dramatic sit-down strikes in the 1930s, named its headquarters Solidarity House, its publication *Solidarity*; at its 1970 convention Walter Reuther told the delegates: "We have taken on the most powerful corporations in the world and despite their power and their great wealth, we have always prevailed, because ... there is no power in the world that can stop the forward march of free men and women when they are joined in the solidarity of human brotherhood."

While in the United States, the word has been ghettoized in the labor movement, solidarity in Europe remains part of mainstream political vocabulary. The labor rights guaranteed in the European Union charter are collectively referred to as "rights to solidarity."

Of course, any word that packs a moral punch will soon find itself appropriated by political hucksters. To wit: For last year's State of the Union, Rep. Bobby Jindal (R-

La.) organized fellow Republicans in a display of "solidarity" with the Iraqis who had just voted in their first election in decades. "Congress Dons Purple Clothes, Ink, for Solidarity with Iraqis," read the AP headline. In addition to their ink-stained fingers, the article noted, "Several women, including newly appointed Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, traded their red suits for violet."

From workers' struggle to Condoleezza Rice's evening wear—what a long, strange trip it's been.

The mundane and the sublime

As elusive as its meaning may be, from the amorphous cloud of centuries' worth of usage and citations, two general categories of solidarity emerge: the mundane and the sublime.

In its mundane sense, solidarity means a robust feeling of togetherness, a "one-for-all, all-for-one-ness" that holds fast a group of people in a common activity. It is best summed up in Benjamin Franklin's exhortation to his co-conspirators that they must all hang together or surely they would hang separately. This kind of solidarity is morally neutral. Union members refusing to cross a picket line exemplify solidarity, but so do white homeowners in a Chicago neighborhood signing restrictive covenants to keep black families out.

Sublime solidarity, on the other hand, embodies a powerful moral aspiration to realize the fundamental fellowship of humankind. The human subject imbued with full solidarity would treat each person the same way she would treat the interests of her closest kin. My father, a community organizer and one-time Jesuit seminarian, explains why solidarity is his favorite word by sketching a continuum that ranges from pearl-clutching pity through sympathy and empathy to arrive finally at solidarity, wherein you are propelled to do something for your fellow human beings, to act as if their interests were your own.

It is this solidarity Jane Addams described as "not philanthropy nor benevolence, but a thing fuller and wider than either of these," and what Gandhi referred to when he spoke of the "essential unity of all people."

As a practical matter, sublime solidarity is nearly impossible to live on a day-to-day basis. Philosopher Richard Rorty argues that while a conception of solidarity is the basis for human moral progress, people rarely act out of solidarity with "all humanity," but rather some specific group with whom they feel joined. Meditating on the fact that Danes and Italians were far more willing to hide and protect their Jewish neighbors during the holocaust than were, say, Belgians, Rorty asks:

Did they say, about their Jewish neighbors, that they deserved to be saved because they were fellow human beings? Perhaps sometimes they did, but surely they would usually, if queried, have used more parochial terms to explain why they were taking risks to protect a given Jew—for example, that this particular Jew was a fellow Milanese, or fellow Jutlander, or a fellow member of the same union or profession, or a fellow bocce player, or a fellow parent of small children.

As Rorty demonstrates, mundane solidarity can be a gateway to something far higher, but just as often it leads to moral quandaries. Mundane solidarity requires allegiance and loyalty to a specific group. You must choose which side you are on; make that side's friends your friends, its enemies your enemies. But not all choices are as stark as those between a fellow bocce ball player and the Gestapo. More often we are faced with competing calls to solidarity from conflicting parties, each deserving of our allegiance. Sublime solidarity requires us to cast our lot with hu-



manity itself, to somehow be on everyone's side at the same time: both the brutalized Kurds and dissidents who suffered untold horrors at Saddam Hussein's hands and the tens of thousands of families who've watched their loved ones killed by an occupying army.

What the great social movements of our time have been able to accomplish is to find the sweet spot between the mundane and often blinkered solidarity of specific communities of interest, and the grandiose but vague notion of the solidarity of all humanity. From the labor battles of the '30s, to the Gandhian independence struggle, to civil rights and anti-apartheid movements, the most uplifting and effective social movements have oriented themselves

towards sublime solidarity while remaining grounded in the mundane but robust cohesion of a specific group with specific aims and specific demands. We may remember moments of moral progress for their dramatic or transcendent quality, but they were first and foremost political victories born of a refusal to pull apart. Such solidarity is the left's proudest tradition, both here and abroad: the unity of purpose and determined fellowship among those battling an unjust order combined with a constant effort to stretch that fellowship to ever larger groups of citizens.

In 1980, as a general strike spread throughout Poland, the Communist government tried an old ruse. Realizing the strike's spiritual and organizational center

was the Lenin Shipyard in Gdansk, the government tried to buy off its workers with a pay raise. Take the money, they said, call off the strike. The trick had worked in the past. But the young dock worker Lech Walesa, fired four years earlier for agitating for free trade unions, said no deal: The strike was no longer a strike for workers' wages at the Lenin Shipyard, but a strike in solidarity with all the others around the country. It wouldn't end until the demands of the new political organization, Solidarity, were met.

In New York, a similar though less dramatic choice faced the TWU and Roger Toussaint. The MTA made a last minute offer to the union that would have maintained the pensions of current members, but forced new workers to pay a significantly higher percentage of their income. Accepting the offer would have been no skin off current workers' noses. But Toussaint angrily refused to sell out the union's "unborn."

Solidarity and its uses

While solidarity can be inculcated, most often it is born of crisis. It reveals itself most fully when tested: on the picket line, on the bridge in Selma, in the rubble of collapsed towers. In an eerily prescient essay on the "Uses of Disaster" in October's *Harper's* (it went to print the day Katrina hit), Rebecca Solnit investigated the odd elation and intense feeling of fellowship and mutual aid that comes in the wake of mass tragedy. "Again and again," she wrote, "we see a latent civil society—a community—arising from the ruins of some disaster and becoming the grounds for connection and joy."

It is for this reason that 9/11 occupies a strangely affectionate place in the nation's collective memory. What we recall is the profound *solidity* of our feelings of togetherness, the empathic stretching that took place: Gentiles in Georgia weeping for dead Jews in Brooklyn. The nation and "our community" were suddenly indistinguishable, which is, at their best, what all those flags waving from front porches and SUVs represented. Hendrik Hertzberg wrote of this "newfound solidarity" in the *New Yorker*, "All of us have seen it and felt it in a variety of small and large ways, in gentler, politer interactions with friends and strangers; in an outpouring of charitable giving and volunteer activity; in tableaux of fellowship among political and civic leaders."

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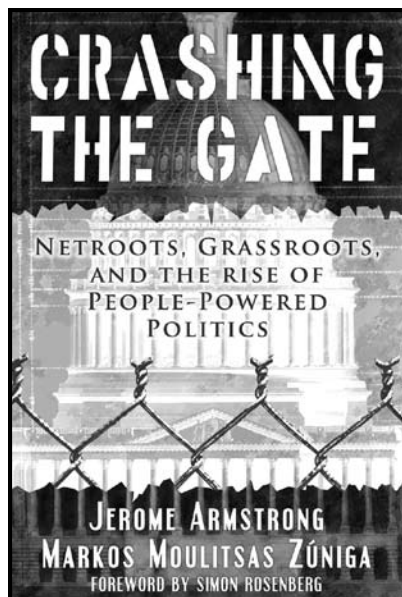


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We sought an outlet for this sentiment: We lined up to give blood, held bake sales and fundraisers, made strange and solemn pilgrimages to the hallowed Ground Zero. But what came of it? Another leader could have used 9/11 to connect Americans to the grieving of the world, to the mothers in Colombo, Chechnya and the Congo also weeping for their children. Another leader could have called for, and would have gotten, a massive increase in American foreign aid. Another leader could have institutionalized an outlet for this feeling of national solidarity in some form of non-military national service.

Instead, we were told to shop. "Get on board," said Bush on September 27, 2001, at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport. "Get down to Disney World in Florida."

From the moment the scale of the attacks were understood, the Bush administration has done everything in its power to tease out the tribal, nationalistic and reactionary threads of this impulse toward togetherness and weave them into a political yoke that keeps the electorate docile and unquestioning. Though the world reached out to the United States in solidarity—remember *Le Monde's* September 12 editorial "We Are All Americans Now"—the administration steered us toward nationalism and then to jingoism. As the fall of 2001 turned to winter, those flags took on a darker, uglier cast.

Four years later, nearly to the day, Americans watched the victims of Katrina left to die by their own government, and felt a rage surprising in its intensity. In a bracing turn of events, the media, when it wasn't hyping lurid hysteria about cannibalism and roving gangs, adopted the indignant tone that solidarity would demand. TV news personalities stopped reporting *on* those who were stranded and suffering and started reporting *from* those who were stranded and suffering. Shepard Smith of Fox News, after railing against the fact that police had barred evacuees from walking over a bridge to Gretna, Louisiana, was interrupted by his colleague Sean Hannity, who was sitting comfortably in a New York studio. "I want to get some perspective here," Hannity said smugly. "That is perspective!" Smith angrily shot back. "That's all the perspective you need."

But what was the outlet for this sentiment? A donation. Even if solidarity was what America felt—a debatable proposition given the bevy of retrograde racism

that found expression in the hurricane's aftermath—the country had no prescribed way of converting sentiment into action other than to call the Red Cross and take out the Visa. But donating money is an act of charity, not solidarity. Once we've paid off our conscience we're free to go back to

As the American right offers that redundant canard "moral values" as its lodestar, the left should offer solidarity.

our lives. That's the problem with pity: It severs so easily.

In order to turn the sentiment of solidarity into concrete political gain and moral achievement, you need organization. And organization is what we lack.

What would we call such an organization, one whose explicit purpose is to foster solidarity?

A union?

With the decline and possible death of the American labor movement, we will lose not only a voice for equality and redistribution at a time when such ideas seem as quaint and vestigial as blood-letting and weather-gods. We will lose a fundamental conception of human togetherness, an understanding that our self-interest is inextricably bound with the interests of others who we may not even know. We will lose a form of mundane solidarity that doesn't rely upon medieval associations of faith, kind or clan, one that requires that we push out the edges of who we think of as "us."

If we lose unions, we lose the concept of solidarity itself. And it's hard to imagine we won't become worse people for it.

Right now, our politics are atomized and transactional: we send checks, we sign petitions, we forward articles. We buy sweat-free clothes, recycle and look for vocations that don't collude too egregiously with evil. But we've unconsciously circumscribed the boundaries of political action. What is MoveOn's equivalent of a strike? As union membership and urban ethnic machines decline and the "netroots," overwhelmingly white and affluent, comes to represent the progressive movement, the left is in danger of becoming, as Thomas Frank wrote in *Le Monde Diplomatique* in February 2004, "a charity operation." That is, "people in sympathy with the downtrodden, not the downtrodden themselves."

As the American right offers that redundant canard "moral values" as its lodestar, the left should offer solidarity. Not retrograde brotherhood, or faith-specific fellowship, but something more robust and difficult and rewarding. The uplift of collective enterprise.

There is no alternative

In an America that fetishizes both the revealed wisdom of the individual consumer and the pursuit of "personal growth" through ceaseless introspection, nurturing an ethos of solidarity is no small task. But if it seems abstract or unattainable, consider the alternative, posted by one angry New Yorker on the TWU's message board:

Dear scumbag TWU membership: If I ran the MTA, I'd can each and everyone one of you. And then I'd automate everything possible about the subway by eliminating the mindless idiots who work in the "information" booths (you've already been replaced by a vending machine—now you're just stealing oxygen), the morons who look out of the subway train with the stupid wrap-around glasses, and the sullen cleaning crews who look like they'd mug you before picking up the trash on the platform ... A pack of trained monkeys could do your job better. And they'd probably be a hell of a lot more grateful for it, too. Do you even realize how outlandish your demands are? Retirement at 55—are you kidding? Do us all a favor and don't come back to work.

Such sentiment is not fringe. Despite a majority of New Yorkers siding with the union, millions saw in the strike a greedy special interest whose fight for better benefits was an insult to their own lack thereof.

The opposite of solidarity is dog-eat-dog, which, if we had to choose a motto for the last quarter century of American history, would work as well as any.

If there's a city where dog-eat-dog is at its most ferocious, it is of course, New York. All the more amazing then, how at a time of maximum stress New Yorkers could remind us that we still can walk a mile in someone else's shoes. ■

CHRISTOPHER HAYES is an In These Times senior editor.

When Red Goes Green

A burgeoning Chinese environmental movement tries to stem the devastation wrought by the country's massive economic transformation

BY JEHANGIR S. POCHA

BEIJING—IN NOVEMBER, MUCH OF China watched in horror as work crews struggled to contain a benzene spill that polluted the northeastern Songhua River and disrupted drinking water supplies to about 12 million people in the region for more than a week.

But even those watching the event unfold on TV from the comfort of their homes in Beijing weren't entirely safe from the effects of China's increasing environmental decay. China's capital is one of the most polluted in the world and lung cancer is now the number one cause of death here, according to China's own State Environmental Protection Administration (SEPA). A thick cloud of sulfur envelops the city most evenings and a recent picture taken from NASA's Terra satellite showed the entire city covered by a nearly opaque band of gray smog.

With more and more people suddenly finding themselves directly affected by endemic pollution, public awareness of and anger over China's deteriorating environment is growing. And so is their willingness to take risks and do something about it, despite the strictures on organized political activity in this authoritarian state.

"People are taking a stand," says Dai Qing, a political and environmental activist who was jailed during the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989. Dai emerged from prison to champion opposition to the giant Three Gorges Dam, which she calls "the most environmentally and socially destructive project in the world."

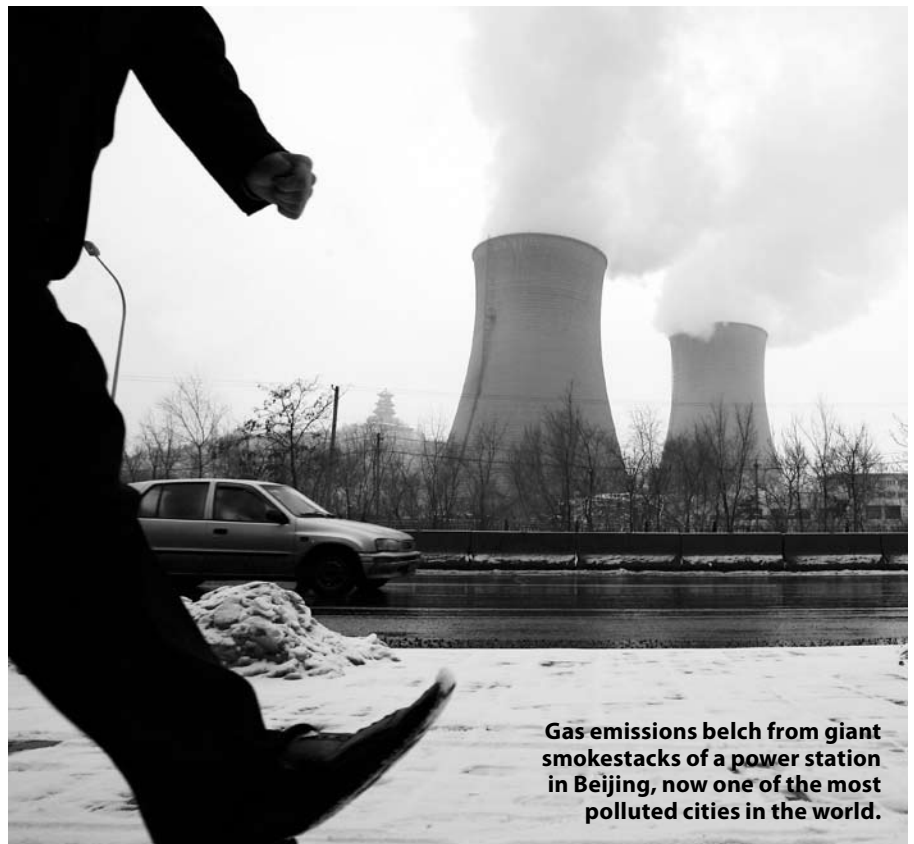
In the decade since China's first environmental NGO, Friends of Nature, was allowed to be registered in 1994,

more than 2,000 environmental NGOs have risen all over the country, according to government reports. Once disparate, under-funded, untrained and badly equipped, many of these NGOs are now learning how to organize and empower themselves. Over the last two months, Dai has been running a communications workshop for local NGO workers from a small office within the bowels of a humble-looking residential neighborhood in Beijing.

Zheng Jun Feng, 43, a scientist with

Green Remote, a local NGO that studies satellite imaging and remote sensing data, says he attended the sessions because he needs to find better ways to get around the controls and constraints the Chinese government places on his work.

"I want to learn how to take my thoughts and ideas to foreign friends," Zheng says, echoing the view of many activists here who say foreign money and expertise is critical for China's budding NGOs to grow.



Gas emissions belch from giant smokestacks of a power station in Beijing, now one of the most polluted cities in the world.

GUANG NIU/GETTY IMAGES

A widening impact

This call is being increasingly heeded abroad. Dai says her sessions are being co-sponsored by Probe International, a Canadian environmental watchdog group, and George Soros' Open Society Institute. One reason international aid is flowing to China's environmental NGOs is that while China's booming economy is buoying global markets, the environmental fallout of this consumption is spreading.

"A lot of sulfur dioxide and other pollutants from China are reaching Japan with the western wind and even the West Coast of the United States," says Dr. Tsutomu Toichi, managing director and chief executive economist of the Institute of Energy Economics in Tokyo.

Yet China, along with other developing nations such as India, is free of any obligations under the Kyoto Protocol, which seeks to reduce the emission of various ozone-depleting gases. (The United States and Australia, who together account for about 27 percent of the world's greenhouse gas emissions, have also not agreed to sign the protocol.)

A concerned Japan has tried to encourage China, which emits about 25 million tons of acid rain-causing sulfur dioxide each year, to install de-sulfurization units in its coal-fired power plants by providing it with technical know-how and more than \$40 million in "green aid." Yet Toichi says that "most Chinese power companies prefer to pay the financial penalties" of not installing the equipment because it's cheaper to do.

Justin Fong, the founder of Moving Mountains, a San Francisco-based NGO helping Dai organize the training sessions, says the activists in his class "may seem ordinary, but they're all doing ground-breaking work, and taking real chances" by trying to change such mentalities.

Initially, Chinese NGOs and journalists had focused on more politically "acceptable" issues, such as tree planting campaigns. But now many are engaged in fierce battles with authorities over the construction of dams and other public works mega-projects, as well as filing lawsuits against polluting factories.

"If we don't speak up, don't take responsibility, our country will be poisoned," says Wu Gang, a journalist with *Shanxi Youth Daily* who has been fighting China's coal mafia in the mineral-

rich central province of Shanxi.

So far, Wu and others like him have had some success, and a growing section of the Chinese leadership has been vocal in calling for China's economic policies to be more environmentally sensitive.

End of the miracle?

China's economic "miracle will end soon because the environment can no longer keep pace," Pan Yue, China's deputy minister for the environment, said in a recent interview with *Der Spiegel* magazine. "Acid rain is falling on one third of the Chinese territory, half of the water in our seven largest rivers is completely useless. ... One third of the urban population

Despite China's pollution problems, the government's development plans remain dedicated to cars instead of public transportation and fossil fuels instead of alternative energy.

is breathing polluted air ... [and] because the air and water are polluted, we are losing between 8 and 15 percent of our gross domestic product."

Statements like this from senior leaders, including Chinese President Hu Jintao, have also encouraged environmentalists, particularly as SEPA has followed them with some action. Earlier this year, the agency suspended work on 30 large projects worth more than \$10 billion after they failed to meet environmental standards. And in December, China's chief environmental regulator, Xie Zhenhua, resigned shortly after the benzene spill in Harbin.

Yet Dai says there has been little change in Beijing's overall economic and environmental policies, which continue to focus on creating the 7 percent annual growth analysts say the country needs to avert domestic political turmoil.

"Real disasters force the government to respond and so they have to say all the right things," Dai says. But "a lot of the words from Hu and [Chinese Premier] Wen Jiabao are just to meet the overlap with the global mood."

What also angers people is that the Chinese government, despite its rhetoric, continues to hide critical information from the public. Just about two months before the accident in Harbin, the Chinese central government had announced

that it would stop treating the death toll from natural disasters as a state secret. But any hope that Beijing was moving toward a new transparency was quickly crushed after it became known that the government withheld news of the benzene spill for 10 days because a powerful state-owned company, the China National Petroleum Corporation, had caused the accident.

"There is also little honesty from the government on environmental issues because they fear the truth might cause turmoil in society," says Kongjian Yu, dean of the Graduate School of Landscape Architecture at Peking University and an environmental campaigner. "This

is still a society in transition and China's top priority is stability and growth."

Indeed, the Chinese government's development plans and economic policy remain dedicated to cars instead of public transportation, fossil fuels instead of alternative energies and pampering manufacturers with cheap resources instead of pushing them towards greater efficiencies. That's made China the world's largest consumer of coal, grain, steel and meat, and the world's second-largest consumer of gas. As a result, SEPA estimates that, in Beijing alone, 70 to 80 percent of all deadly cancer cases are related to the environment.

"All this is waking Chinese people to environmental issues just as the extinction of the bald eagle awakened Americans to preservation in the 1960s," Yu says.

Fong says the 20-odd public interest lawyers, journalists and nongovernmental organization managers who attend his three-hour sessions after putting in a full day's work are a determined bunch.

"There's this new sense of 'I can,'" Fong says. "And it's not just with the younger generation. Even older people here have a feeling, a passion to change things. This country's future is at stake." ■

JEHANGIR POCHA, an In These Times contributing editor, reports regularly from the Far East.

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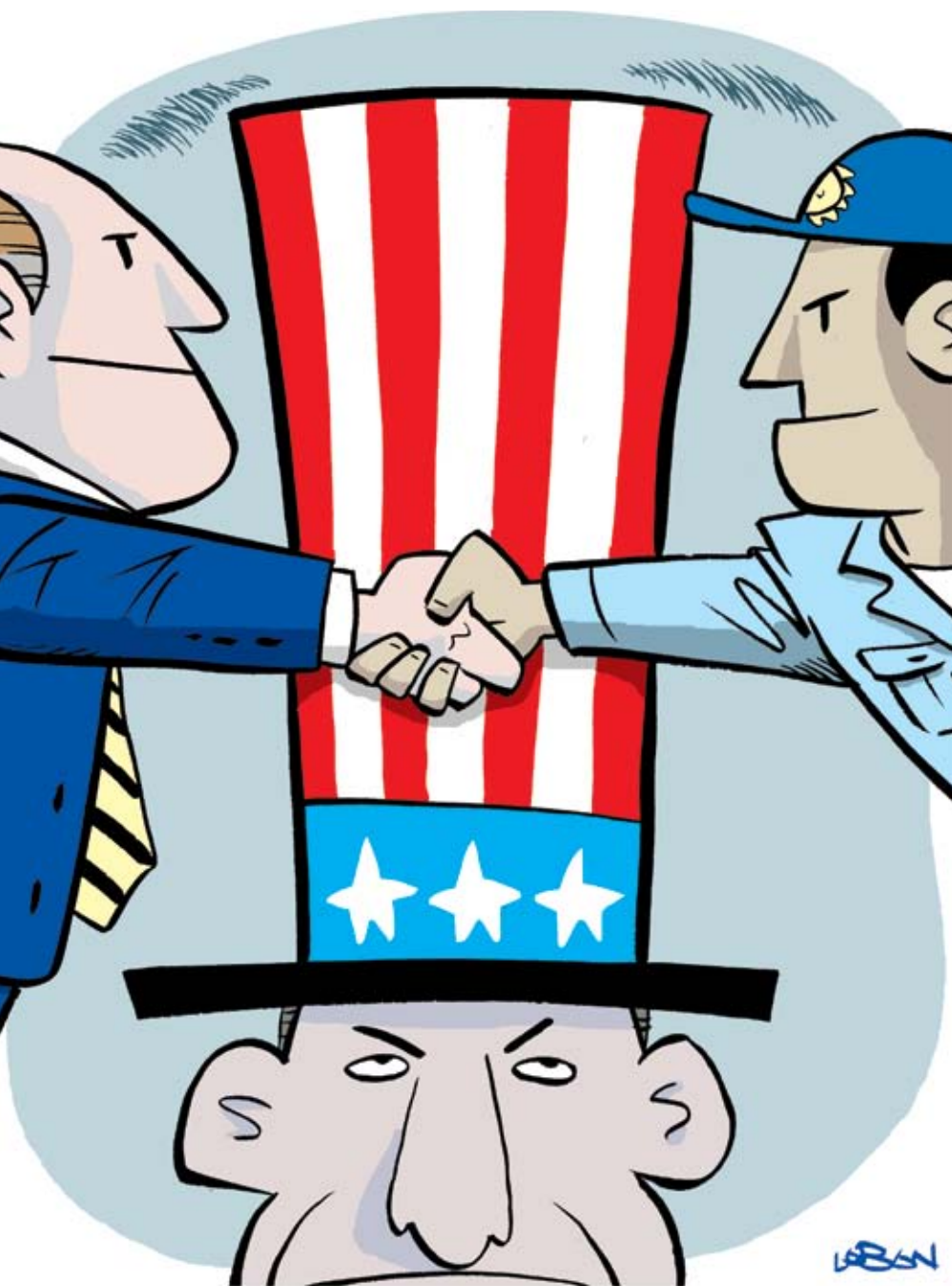
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Paradigm Shift

Labor has found success by eschewing NLRB elections in favor of employer neutrality and card checks

BY DAVID MOBERG



MIRNA BLANCO, AN IMMIGRANT Salvadoran janitor in Houston, and Kelvin Banks, an African-American cellular telephone customer service representative in Jackson, Miss., don't know each other and couldn't even communicate easily if they met. But they do have something in common. Both were active in recent, large-scale union organizing campaigns that succeeded in the South, a region long resistant to unionization. And both their campaigns ultimately relied on related, if slightly different, strategies to keep employers from intimidating workers while organizers signed up a majority and won union recognition.

Their victories bring a sign of hope that despite continued decline, the labor movement may yet be able to grow again, if unions will put in the effort. In recent years, roughly four-fifths of new union members have won recognition by circumventing the process of elections run by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). When unions persuade employers to remain neutral and agree simply to check union cards for majority support (a process known as "card check"), unions typically win recognition about four-fifths of the time. In contrast, through NLRB-run elections, unions gain certification only about three-fifths of the time.

But experience in both the United States and Canada suggests that the disparity between these two organizing models is even greater. Using a strategy of employer neutrality and card checks, rather than combative elections, unions do twice as well in organizing campaigns involving more than 500 workers, precisely the large-scale efforts needed for a labor turnaround. They are also more likely to increase their organizing efforts: In British Columbia, unions undertook twice as

many organizing drives when card checks were employed as they did when recognition elections were required.

Changing the terrain of union organizing is emerging as one of the nation's key political battles. AFL-CIO organizing director Stewart Acuff argues that progressives in particular need to make worker organizing rights one of their top priorities. "People on the left have to recognize that any dream of a more just society is an illusion without a vibrant labor movement and workers' right to organize," Acuff says.

In December, in conjunction with International Human Rights Day, tens of thousands of union members around the world rallied for stronger protection of the right to organize. In the United States, unions focused on the Employee Free Choice Act. The act, sponsored by 208 members of Congress, requires employers to accept card check verification of union support, encourages employers to negotiate an initial contract with workers and penalizes more severely employers that engage in unfair anti-union practices.

A new study by researchers at the University of Illinois at Chicago concludes that in NLRB election campaigns such legal and illegal anti-union tactics are "both pervasive and effective." Even in heavily unionized Chicago, the study found that when workers tried to organize, 30 percent of employers fired workers engaged in organizing, 49 percent threatened to close or relocate the business and 82 percent employed anti-union consultants. Despite majority support in nearly all

cases, unions won only 31 percent of the campaigns. In nearly one-third of the campaigns, unions withdrew even before an election was held. Political scientist Gordon Lafer argues that except for the use of ballots, these elections meet none of the standards for fair elections in a political democracy.

Despite the 208 sponsors, the Employee

Employees International Union (SEIU) began organizing community and religious support for workers' rights two years ago. The union then used that network to reach the underpaid, mainly Latino immigrant janitors who cleaned Houston's office buildings. Janitors from the Chicago SEIU local also came to Houston to help on the organizing campaign, which was

Without laws that adequately protect workers' rights, unions fight to win employer neutrality and card check any way they can—bargaining, striking and mobilizing public pressure.

Free Choice Act is going nowhere in the current Republican congress, but unions are using it to put the issue in the center of political debate. And despite court rulings overturning state and local legislation that favors worker-friendly firms for public projects or prevents public money from funding anti-union campaigns, the AFL-CIO is planning this year to widely introduce legislation in the states that prohibits employers from subjecting employees to their religious or political views.

Putting direct action to work

But beyond pushing legislation, unions are changing the model for winning recognition, Ohio State University law professor James Brudney argues, by using direct action to gain employer neutrality and card check rights. In Houston, the Service

publicly launched last April. In July, janitors at Mirna Blanco's building went on strike and then set up picket lines at buildings cleaned by their employer in cities like Chicago, Washington and Sacramento, where the local union janitors refused to cross picket lines. "I liked it," says Blanco, a 40-year old mother of three. "I felt we were doing something for others, for our co-workers."

In janitor campaigns, the immediate employers are cleaning contractors, which can be either national or local firms, but the real power rests with the building owners and managers, which are also often part of national firms. SEIU typically pressures building owners to accept unionization. This assures contractors that the owners will not replace them if their workers unionize. By organizing the entire labor market, SEIU also assures contractors that other firms won't undercut them by reducing wages and benefits. Because building owners in other cities recognized that they can live with unionized contractors and pass through the costs, they were more willing to succumb to the union's threat to turn the Houston fight into a national campaign. By the end of the year, much earlier than organizers expected, election auditors had verified that 5,300 of the 7,000 janitors in Houston had signed union membership cards.

Traditionally, unions face a brutal fight to win an election, then another fight to win a contract. The union ends up with an embittered relationship with the employer, says SEIU Executive Vice President Eliseo Medina. "So from our point of view, if you're going to have that struggle, it's better to have it up front over whether to have a union," he says. Ultimately, he says,

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organizing by winning neutrality first can create a more productive bargaining relationship.

In Jackson, at the customer service office of AT&T Wireless, Kelvin Banks was discouraged from forming a union by the anti-union hostility of the managers. But when Cingular Wireless bought the company two years ago, Banks knew that the company had a history of neutrality and immediately began organizing, making his co-workers the first of about 16,000 new Cingular workers organized by the Communications Workers of America (CWA) last year, many of them in the South and Southwest. "People offer all kinds of theories," says CWA organizing director Ed Sabol, "that young people, white-collar people, professional people, new economy workers aren't interested in unions." Yet those same workers at Cingular readily joined the union.

CWA's Cingular success, in a growing field at the heart of the union's core telecommunications jurisdiction, is a result—like the Houston SEIU victory—of unionized workers using their clout to make it possible for new workers to or-

ganize. Starting in 1992, CWA negotiated with Southwestern Bell—the predecessor of SBC, the parent of Cingular—an agreement for the company to be neutral as the union organized subsidiaries. But the cellular company continued to resist unionization for most of the decade, as CWA fought both to organize and to strengthen the neutrality agreement. With neutrality secured, it was easier to use CWA members, not just trained organizers, to organize large numbers more quickly. "With card check and neutrality you can involve a lot more people who are rooted in the communities," says Danny Fetonte, a CWA organizing director in Texas. "You're not going to war constantly."

Without laws that adequately protect workers' rights, unions win neutrality and card check any way they can—bargaining, striking, and mobilizing pressure from customers, investors, regulators, and political, religious and community leaders. European unions often pressure European-based multinationals to reject the anti-union tactics common in the United States. This fall, SEIU, with unions in several countries and Union Network International, a global union federation, launched a global campaign to organize security guards employed by the three dominant firms in the industry. Swedish-based Securitas has pledged neutrality, but British-based Group 4 Securicor is fighting unionization at its U.S. Wackenhut division.

The Bush-led backlash

The unions' successes have created a backlash. Despite a long history of the courts and NLRB accepting card check procedures, the Bush NLRB decided two years ago to review whether card check results could be more easily challenged. Congressional Republicans have backed legislation—with only 77 sponsors—that would require secret ballot elections for recognition. The legal arms of the National Right to Work Committee and the Chamber of Commerce have initiated lawsuits to stop neutrality agreements, and those organizations are increasingly challenging the use of corporate campaigns by unions to pressure companies. As a result, many unions are keeping quiet about their neutrality and card check successes.

AFL-CIO's Acuff argues that aggressive tactics to win neutrality are legitimate given the "all-out war at the workplace" waged by employers, and the frequent links between "illegal and unethical be-

havior in the workplace" and other corporate behavior, from shady financial recordkeeping to bad environmental practices. And his counterpart with the Change to Win Federation, SEIU Executive Vice President Tom Woodruff, calls anti-card check legislation "ridiculous." "Most people join organizations by filling out applications, everything from church to civic associations and baseball leagues," Woodruff says. "It's really just to prevent workers from being in unions."

Despite the attacks, victories such as those with Cingular workers and Houston janitors are encouraging more organizing throughout the South and Southwest, and more ambitious pursuit of neutrality and card check agreements. SEIU hopes to replicate its Houston success elsewhere in the South, and is using recent victories to pursue public-sector organizing in Houston. CWA will be escalating fights at Comcast and Verizon Wireless, where employer opposition has been strong, even when there have been neutrality agreements. It is also organizing municipal workers in Jackson.

Other unions are also pursuing similar large-scale organizing strategies that attempt to win neutrality. Those include continuation of a successful UAW campaign that targets parts and vehicle makers in the South, including foreign-owned firms; a new international campaign by the United Mine Workers of America and the Australian miners union against Peabody Energy; and multi-union building trades organizing in Phoenix. In one of the most ambitious efforts, UNITE HERE will be using this year's carefully created line-up of contract expirations to try to negotiate neutrality and card check agreements with some of the nation's biggest hotel operators.

These campaigns for neutrality sometimes involve potentially problematic cooperation with corporate demands, such as agreeing to contractual terms that are weaker than in other parts of an industry as a condition of neutrality. But working from its present position of limited strongholds and impotence throughout most of the U.S. economy, the labor movement's best hope for revival requires restraining employer interference in organizing by direct action and, eventually, by legislation.

It's not just labor's fight, but a crucial part of the broad crusade for human rights and democracy. ■

DAVID MOBERG is an In These Times senior editor.

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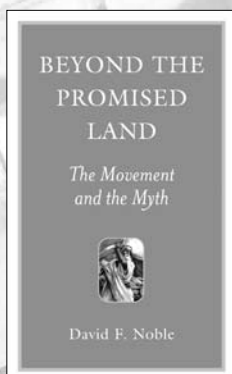
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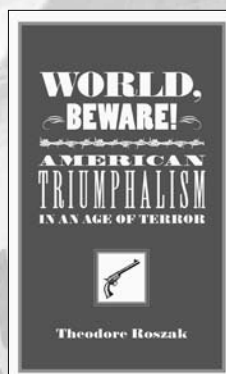
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Talking Trash

BY AARON SARVER

How much needless plastic packaging do you throw away every year? Why is it cheaper to buy a new DVD player than get your old one fixed? And where does all that garbage go, anyway?

In her new book, *Gone Tomorrow: The Hidden Life of Garbage*, Heather Rogers answers these questions by focusing on the post-WWII boom, when planned obsolescence—the manufacturing of consumer goods designed to wear out—changed the way Americans consume and, consequently, the way we waste.

Rogers details the competing interests of manufacturers and the emerging American consumer in the early 1950's. In a recent talk at the Chicago independent bookstore Quimby's, she set the scene: "Most Americans have bought a car or a house, all the appliances they need. U.S. industry starts to realize they're going to have a crisis on their hands because they have such tremendously productive assembly lines. And they came up with built-in obsolescence. If you want to understand modern garbage today, you have to understand built-in obsolescence." This shift, she explained, was accompanied by a full-scale public relations campaign that acclimated Americans to using disposable products. It transformed the United States from a country that wasted relatively little in the late 19th century into a nation that uses and discards 30 percent of the world's resources while being home to only 4 percent of its population.

In These Times recently sat down with Rogers to learn more.

What made you want to write a book about garbage?

Garbage collection is one of those systems in a city's infrastructure that makes a city work. It's one of those things that's sort of invisible and it seems like it just happens and everything's OK.

When you throw something away, you sometimes ask yourself, "Where does this ultimately go and is the system that we have a good one? Is it sustainable?"

So, I wanted to know where it went. Garbage is this substance through which we can make connections between larger environmental crises and our daily lives, something that is often hard to do because those larger crises are really abstract.

In researching the book, you traveled to a lot of waste facilities and landfills. What were those facilities like up close?

Really disturbing. I went to an incinerator in Newark, New Jersey, and it had a room that to me looked like a coliseum full of household garbage bags. The individual contents of each bag become completely inconsequential. It's like a sea of garbage, it's apocalyptic. It was a couple days' worth of garbage for this one facility.

After I visited these places, I had nightmares, which I was a little surprised about. It's pretty awesome, in an amoral sense of the word, to see how many resources and how much ingenuity goes into annihilating discarded commodities in this country.

What are some of the long-term problems with storing our waste in these mega-landfills?

Landfills are this high-tech system that's supposed to protect the environment. Actually, they don't protect the environment; it's unknown how much of the landfill gas they actually can capture. Half of landfill gas is comprised of methane, which is 21 times more

heat-trapping than carbon dioxide. It's a significant global warming threat.

Then you've got the leachate [liquid that has seeped through waste to the bottom of landfills] and other toxins that are brewing inside the landfill, just being held in by this plastic liner. The EPA has said that these liners will fail in much shorter spans of time than initially predicted, and they were only expected to last somewhere between 30 and 50 years anyway. We've got these massive landfills all over the country that are environmental time bombs. It's a complete disaster.

It seems like one of the long-term solutions to our waste problem is simply to create less waste. How do current recycling programs factor into creating less stuff that ends up in landfills?

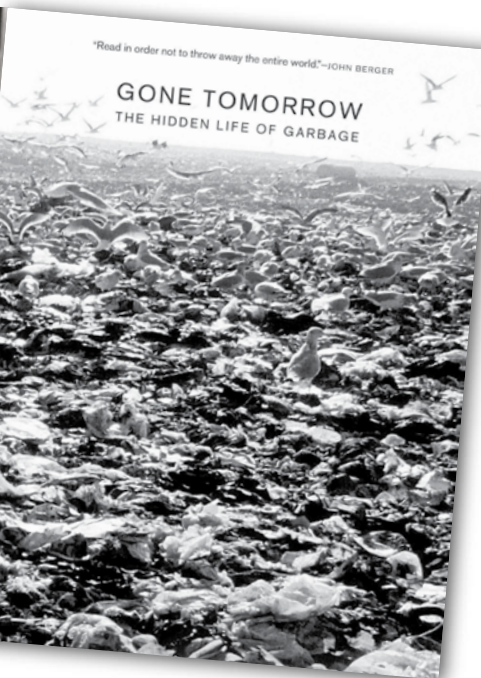
Recycling is a really important part of the puzzle and it's important because it's so much better to recycle discarded goods than to burn them or bury them. It saves tremendous amounts of energy, creates much less pollution, it saves natural resources—all of those things are really important.

That said, it's crucial for people who are thinking about these issues to understand the limitations of recycling. Its built-in limitations are called "down cycling": When materials are reprocessed over and over again, they begin to break down on the molecular level, so paper fibers become shorter and can't hold together, glass and plastic molecules become weaker and aren't strong enough to hold together.

The other limitation is that the market is a real obstacle. Recycled materials are supposed to compete on the open market with virgin raw materials that have received massive subsidies over the years from the U.S. government. It's really impossible to calculate the real costs of a plastic water bottle, because the plastics industry has received such a huge amount of support from our tax dollars



Heather Rogers



over the years. Recycling is supposed to pay for itself without those kinds of supports. We pay \$45-50 billion a year to discard our garbage, but we can't pay for recycling. It defies logic.

Also, recycling is the last line of defense. It's a waste treatment method that deals with waste after it's already been made, so it doesn't do anything to stem waste production in the first place, which is what we need to be talking about. What that means is, going into the realm of production and saying, "You can't make toxic waste, you must make products that are easy to fix, that last longer, that aren't designed to break quickly." These were all demands that were made in the '70s but they fell by the wayside because recycling was so successful that people forgot the importance of demanding these waste reduction and elimination measures.

In the book, you look to history for solutions to our current waste problems. Can you explain the "extended recycling system" from the mid-19th century that you detail?

A lot of household discards were being collected by cart men and taken to factories. Rags were taken to paper factories to be remade into paper; food scraps were taken to farmers, etc. Because farms were located in such close proximity to the city, farmers would bring in their produce

and they would take animal waste back with them to the farm. There was what fertilizer historian Richard Lines calls "an extended recycling system" between the city and the country at this time, a connection between the produce of the farm being taken into the city and then the wastes of the city being taken to the farm to grow more produce.

In a free market economy, can we really expect industry to adopt sustainable manufacturing processes?

No, we can't. The way that a free market economy works is that it must have unfettered access to natural resources and also to labor. But if it doesn't have unfettered access to natural resources, it can't compete.

Now, there is this rise of green capitalism. Aspects of it are positive and very agreeable. We need to be able to reuse the commodities that we make and sell over and over again. And we need to re-design the production process. All of that is right on track. But green capitalists say that all these things can happen voluntarily, that when companies become aware of the damage they're doing, eventually they'll start making the right choice.

In my assessment, what happens when companies do this is one of two things. If you've got a company and

you've decided to go green, it's going to cost more. You're going to be competing with companies that aren't doing that, and aren't incurring the greater cost. Either that's going to drive you out of business, or into the realm of manufacturing luxury items to sell to people who have now embraced this whole new level of consumption that's connected to organic living, organic lifestyles. But those goods aren't available to working class families or to people who live in public housing. Those are high-end consumer items. So, that kind of change is not going to affect a greater change across the board.

If we can't count on industry to adopt sustainable practices and the government is not likely to regulate them into doing so, then what are realistic solutions?

We need to talk about social justice and economic justice when we're talking about environmental issues. The way that those have been kept separate has held up progress that the environmental movement could have made. And it's made the mainstream environmental movement, in my opinion, very docile. They don't talk about environmental problems in the context of the economic system that they exist in. Once you start doing that, you automatically end up talking about race and class because they are so integral to the way capitalism works.

It's really important not to couch it in individual terms, which is the way this discussion is always framed. I want to talk about the responsibility of manufacturers and the role that they play in this. When people talk about getting at the root of garbage and stemming waste at its source, they always target the household, the individual consumer. That's not the source of garbage. For every ton of household waste, there are more than 70 tons of manufacturing waste—mining, petrochemical production, etc. The vast majority of wastes are created during the manufacturing process, and that is where we should focus. ■

AARON SARVER is the associate publisher of *In These Times*. He co-produces *Fire on the Prairie*, *In These Times'* monthly radio show.

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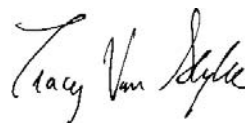
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COURTESY OF VERSO

BY MEREDITH L. WEISS

Radicals Without Borders

When the *New York Times Magazine*, for an end-of-the-millennium special issue, asked the oft-persecuted Indonesian novelist Pramoedya Ananta Toer to choose the best story of the last 1,000 years, he offered a somewhat ironic selection:

the 1860 work of Dutchman Eduard Douwes Dekker, *Max Havelaar, or the Coffee Auctions of the Dutch Trading Company*. As Pramoedya explained, this now largely-forgotten book touches on two key “processes” of the past millennium: the intercultural mixing prompted by the West’s search for spices and the emancipatory educational opportunities provided to colonial subjects.

A long-time civil servant in the Dutch East Indies government, Douwes Dekker resigned when his charges of official corruption fell on deaf ears. He poured his frustration into *Max Havelaar*, whose title character is a Dutch colonial official who turns against the system of forcing Javanese farmers to grow cash crops to ensure steady profits for Dutch investors in what is now Indonesia. The book be-

came the *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* of the Dutch East Indies—galvanizing liberals in the (global) North, and forcing the Dutch government to adopt a relatively more compassionate “ethical policy.” Dutch-educated Indonesians, many inspired by this former colonial official’s novel, launched a nationalist movement in the early 20th century that culminated in revolution in the ’40s and inspired counterparts across European empires.

Pramoedya is not alone in his esteem for Douwes Dekker’s novel. Benedict Anderson—renowned both as a Southeast Asianist and a political theorist—lauds it as well for its unprecedented anticolonial punch. Still, Anderson’s most recent book, *Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the Anti-Colonial Imagination*, complicates Pramoedya’s assertion that

Max Havelaar and Indonesia “sparked” the decolonization process. Anderson foregrounds Filipino nationalism—at a time when the Philippines was under Spanish rule—situating this movement within the late-19th century global milieu of politically charged art and literature, anarchist stunts, and widespread anticolonial, anticapitalist strivings. While in his previous work Anderson has highlighted the distinctive national identity of, for instance, Java or Siam, here he muddies the picture, showing not just that nationalism is a construct adaptable to different circumstances but that even the most heralded local hero may march under several flags.

Under Three Flags tells several stories, brought into focus as they concatenate in Filipino nationalism. Anderson describes the book as “an experiment in ... political astronomy. It attempts to map the gravitational force of anarchism between militant nationalisms on opposite sides of the planet.” As he traces the rise of anarchist ideas and actions across Western Europe starting in the late 19th century, he brings into the discussion sketches of revolutions and revolutionaries in Cuba, the Philippines, Haiti and Japan.

Anderson himself defies easy characterization. A political scientist and true polyglot with an abiding interest in culture, history and apparently most everything else, Anderson is best known for his 1983 *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. This slim but trenchant volume posits nations as “imagined communities” fostered by the localization of religion and politics, the diminution of absolute monarchy and conceptions of divine right, and the interconnected growth of both capitalism and mass print media.

His writings have been featured in the *New Left Review*—including a 2004 triptych of articles that comprise much of *Under Three Flags*. Anderson distinguishes himself by marshalling unconventional evidence, innovatively compiled, and by making no apology for his own political sympathies. Even when he prances off on distant tangents (which, alas, does happen here), Anderson’s wit and charming inquisitiveness keep the reader with him. A word to the wise, or at least, to the curious: Don’t skip the footnotes.

The “First Filipino”

Under Three Flags’ central character is the “First Filipino,” novelist José Rizal (1861-96). Highly intelligent, well-educated, and widely traveled, Rizal occupied three worlds. The first was the Bismarck-dominated interstate system of the latter half of the 19th century, in which mon-

Anderson describes the book as “an experiment in ... political astronomy. It attempts to map the gravitational force of anarchism between militant nationalisms on opposite sides of the planet.”

archism and the papacy were both in decline. The second was the milieu of the ascendant, but still savaged, global Left, epitomized in the Paris Commune of 1871, its harsh suppression, and the subsequent rise of anarchism as the prime vehicle to contest capitalism, imperialism and their ilk. The last was the crisis-riddled, corrupt, and dying Spanish empire.

Anderson superimposes on these sweeping trajectories a close examination of the galvanizing role of nationalist novels, particularly the brooding oddness of Rizal’s second such book, *El Filibusterismo*. He also explores a multinational cast of characters, including key figures in the Cuban, Puerto Rican and Filipino independence movements; and the organic, symbiotic intertwining of art, literature and politics. In doing this, Anderson revisits the role of not just the vernacular media central to *Imagined Communities*, but avant-garde publications of the metropole as well.

The book opens and closes, however, with Rizal’s likewise-remarkable contemporary, Isabelo de los Reyes, a Filipino journalist and folklorist. De los Reyes comes off a more earnest and practical character, with a greater penchant for action than Rizal. If Anderson’s story has a hero, it is less Rizal than the sincere, energetic, anarchist-inflected de los Reyes, in company with other worker-bees of the revolution. Bookending the narrative with such a concrete and, well, likeable character helps ground this sometimes abstract and abstruse account and makes real the connection between the global flow of ideas, people,

resources and local activist experience.

Anderson’s analytical focus and investigative bent are in sharpest relief in his textual analysis of Rizal’s novels: tracing the origins of a single compelling phrase, “*el demonio del las comparaciones*,” reveals a nest of questions about Rizal’s reading habits, linguistic aptitude, friends, sympa-

thies and use of allusions. Here Anderson, abetted by his historian brother Perry, is more archaeologist than astronomer, to terrific effect. As in his other works, Anderson prefers to provide his own translations—and except where specifically noted, he offers both the original and the translation of all quoted passages, however lengthy. Moreover, he critiques extant translations, uncovering their biases and inaccuracies, as a useful (if sometimes catty) exercise in intellectual history. He aptly uses archived manuscripts (most notably, of Rizal’s *El Filibusterismo*), masses of personal and official correspondence, and carefully selected secondary sources, and holds it all together with a lifetime’s accumulated grasp of the subjects at hand. Given the significance of facility in language to the sort of cross-border fertilization Anderson describes, his scope and methods both reinforce his scholarly authority and highlight his affinity with the clever cosmopolitans he is describing.

At home and away

Anderson calls this period “the Age of Early Globalization.” However, one might contest just how “early” the globalization Anderson examines is. Pramodya, for instance, frames his discussion of the anticolonial ripples launched by Douwes Dekker and Indonesia in an overview of a much earlier phase, one of religious missions and the quest for spices. The mercantilist political economic order that vindicated colonial expansion itself represents the cross-border spread of transformative ideas, not just of coercion and exploitation. The intellectual processes

and transcontinental political trends Anderson depicts thus do not represent *the* early phase of globalization, though they are part of that long sequence.

What Anderson's narrative does embody, though, is the multilayered context implied by the book's title. Anderson complicates his own notion of the "imagined community." Early nationalists may have felt as much affinity to their co-ideologists abroad as to their erstwhile co-nationalists at "home"—and indeed, many were the sort of itinerant, cosmopolitan, linguistically agile global citizens so often presumed unique to our current stage of globalization. These were men and women of multiple loyalties—followers of several flags. But nowhere in the book does Anderson specifically address the notion of the flag as nationalist symbol. We are left to deduce for ourselves that the flags on the book's cover are those of the Filipino revolutionary organization Katipunan (in one of its many iterations), anarchism (the Black Flag), and independent Cuba. (It is intriguing that despite the book's title and cover art, not one of the many illustrations within features a flag.)

In fact, none of the activists in Anderson's account was likely to be following these three flags in tandem, but all did or could negotiate multiple overlapping loyalties—to transnational intellectual currents, to local ethnic or family groups, to newly-imagined nations, to real friends and apparent compatriots in the metropole, to subjects of colonial power elsewhere.

Unfortunately, we run up against a pesky problem of causality in sorting out the significance of these various potential allies and influences. Rizal, for instance, was an unwilling icon of the Katipunan and assiduously distanced himself from its insurrectionary shenanigans. He moved in radical Left circles but seemed to care little for political theory. He was willing to offer Spain his medical services during Martí's revolution in Cuba and was dubious of the latter's revolutionary potential. Meanwhile, Andrés Bonifacio and Emilio Aguinaldo—respectively, the Katipunan's founder and the man who upstaged him to declare Filipino independence—were relatively provincial local boys, who followed events in Cuba largely in terms of what they meant for Spain's ability to cope with revolutions on two fronts simultaneously. They may have operated amidst a global context of anarchism, but were apparently not sub-

scribers themselves.

In other words, we see the global spread of ideas, yet observe the relative isolation of so many of the localized (however globally inspirational) actions that could be informed by those ideas. This disconnect is neither original nor damning—"think globally, act locally" and "all politics is local" have achieved the status of inanity because they are so obviously true. Still, it does sug-



COURTESY OF VERSO

José Rizal during his student years

gest that Anderson could go further to convince us of anarchism's "gravitational force" as an ideology, rather than as an emblem of the escalating levels of swashbuckling political violence and boldness.

A grand dollhouse

At times, reading this book gives one the sensation of looking into an elaborate, timeless, placeless dollhouse—a feeling only compounded by the sprinkling through the text of photographs, maps, and other artwork, some more clearly germane than others. We peer into a room, exult in the gorgeous details, nod toward the stylized inhabitants, then move on to the next room. We note doorways and corridors connecting the rooms, but suspect most are little-used. We sense that somewhere to the right of this rarefied world is an ogre.

The impression is of a dangerous and vulnerable world, but a rather glamorous one. At the end of our tour, we are left to our own devices to imagine the community that might people such an edifice: Of the books in the library, which would they read? Does the motley crowd in the servants' quarters find common cause?

The unimaginative reader might crave more of a back-story.

But one surmises that Anderson is not writing for the unimaginative reader. Those who will most enjoy this book are readers who enjoy a bit of hands-on excavation, not pat summation. Here we have a chance to follow tangents, investigate coincidences and reconstruct a grand dollhouse of the mid-to-late-19th century world, posing artists and journalists, demagogues and bystanders, kings and captains-general, revolutionaries and reactionaries all within the same broad schema. We understand the temporal and ideological interconnections of that world from Anderson's account, even if some of the precise ties remain hazy.

Most of all, Anderson's latest book is about possibilities. Today, we have currents and we have comrades. We have novels. We have media far more extensive, varied, and widely-disseminated than the amazing propaganda rags, literary magazines and vernacular newspapers of anarchism's heydays. We have quick, easy transoceanic transportation. We have long known that nationalism is not exclusive of a transnational left (or right), that citizenship is institutionally and symbolically important but culturally mutable, that our affinities and inspirations as political actors are—and should be—multifarious. In short: Why wave just one flag?

Through this compelling, if necessarily inconclusive study, Anderson helps us interrogate "globalization." He pushes us to move beyond the knee-jerk assumptions of cultural imperialism and crass corporate exploitation that so color contempo-

Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the Anti-Colonial Imagination

By Benedict Anderson, Verso, 255 pages
\$25.00

rary discussions of the topic, and instead see the potential of a world in which, more than ever before, we are mobile, we are informed, and we have the capability of applying shared ideas to distinctive causes through cross-border, collaborative engagement. ■

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TELEVISION

Jack Bauer and the Ethics of Urgency

By Slavoj Žižek

THE FIFTH SEASON of “24,” the phenomenally successful Fox television series, premiered on January 15. Composed of 24 one-hour episodes, the show chronicles the workday of the fictitious L.A.-based Counter Terrorist Unit (CTU) as it desperately attempts to thwart a catastrophic terrorist attack. (In season four, they stopped a stolen nuclear weapon from exploding above a major U.S. city.) The “real-time” nature of the series confers a strong sense of urgency, emphasized by the ticking of a digital clock and accentuated with hand-held camera shots and split-screens showing the concurrent actions of various characters.

Even the commercial breaks contribute to this sense of urgency: Before a commercial, we see an on-screen digital clock signalling it is “7:46.” When the ac-

tion resumes, the digital clock reads “7:51.” The length of the break in our, the spectators’ real time is exactly equivalent to the temporal gap in the on-screen narrative, as if the events nonetheless *go on* as we watch commercials. This makes it seem like the ongoing action is so pressing, spilling over into the real time of the spectator, that even commercial breaks cannot interrupt it.

This brings up a crucial question: What does this all-pervasive sense of urgency mean *ethically*? The pressure of events is so overbearing, the stakes are so high, that they necessitate a suspension of ordinary ethical concerns. After all, displaying moral qualms when the lives of millions are at stake plays into the hands of the enemy.

CTU agents act in a shadowy space outside the law, doing things that “simply have to be done” in order to save society from the terrorist threat. This includes not only torturing terrorists when they are caught, but torturing CTU members or their closest relatives when they are suspected of terrorist links. In the fourth season, among those tortured were the secretary of de-

fense’s son-in-law and his own son (both with the secretary’s full knowledge and support), as well as a female member of CTU, wrongly suspected of passing information to the terrorists. (After the torture, when new data confirms her innocence, she is asked to return to work. And since this is an emergency and every person is needed, she accepts!) The CTU agents not only treat terrorist suspects in this way—after all, they are dealing with the “ticking bomb” situation evoked by Alan Dershowitz to justify torture in his book, *Why Terrorism Works*—they also treat themselves as expendable, ready to lay down their colleagues’ or their own lives if this will help prevent the terrorist act.

Special Agent Jack Bauer, played by Kiefer Sutherland, embodies this attitude at its purest. Without qualms, he tortures others and allows his superiors to put his life on the line. At the end of the fourth season, he agrees to be turned over to the People’s Republic of China as a scapegoat for a CTU covert operation that killed a Chinese diplomat. Although he knows he will be tortured and imprisoned for

[art space]



I ♥ the ‘Burbs: Modern Day Suburban Life, on display until April 9 in metropolitan New York’s Katonah Museum of Art. The multimedia exhibit explores a half-century of suburban development. From a post-war destination for mostly white, middle-class Americans to its later diversification and sprawl, the show examines the suburbs’ impact on American culture, economics and politics.

The exhibit rides the white picket fence on whether the suburbs are the pinnacle of domestic accomplishment or a destructive illusion. For Ellen Keiter, the curator, the show is merely an “honest and critical look at the complexity of suburban life and to better understand the places where we live.”

For more information, contact the Katonah Museum of Art at (914) 232-9555.



Jack Bauer: loving father, willing torturer

life, he promises not to say anything that would hurt U.S. interests. The end of the fourth season leaves Jack in a paradigmatic situation: When he is informed by the ex-president of the United States, his close ally, that someone in the government ordered his death (delivering him to the wily Chinese torturers is considered too much of a security risk), his two closest friends in CTU organize his fake death. He then disappears into nowhere, anonymous, officially non-existing.

In the “war on terror,” it is not only the terrorists but the CTU agents who become what philosopher Giorgio Agamben calls *homini sacer*—those who can be killed with impunity since, in the eyes of the law, their lives no longer count. While the agents continue to act on behalf of a legal power, their acts are no longer covered and constrained by the law—they operate in an empty space within the domain of the law.

It is here that we encounter the series’ fundamental ideological lie: In spite of this thoroughly ruthless attitude of self-instrumentalization, the CTU agents, especially Jack, remain “warm human beings,” caught in the usual emotional dilemmas of “normal” people. They love their wives and children, they suffer jealousy—but at a moment’s notice they are ready to sacrifice their loved ones for their mission. They are something like the psychological equivalent of decaffeinated coffee, doing all the horrible things the situation necessitates, yet without paying the subjective price for it.

Consequently, “24” cannot be simply dismissed as a pop cultural justification for the problematic methods of the United States in its war on terror. More is at

stake. Recall the lesson of Francis Ford Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now*: The figure of Kurtz is not a reminder of some barbaric past, but the necessary outcome of modern Western power. Kurtz was a perfect soldier—as such, through his over-identification with the military power system, he turned into the excess that the system had to eliminate in an operation that itself imitated the ruthlessness of Kurtz, what it was ostensibly fighting against.

This is the dilemma for those in power: How to obtain Kurtz without Kurtz’s pathology? How to get people to do the necessary dirty job without turning them into monsters? SS chief Heinrich Himmler faced the same dilemma. When confronted with the task of liquidating the Jews of Europe, Himmler adopted the heroic attitude of “Somebody has to do the dirty job, so let’s do it!” It is easy to do a noble thing for one’s country, up to sacrificing one’s life for it. It is much more difficult to commit a *crime* for one’s country.

In *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Hannah Arendt provided a precise description of how the Nazi executioners endured the horrible acts they performed. Most of them were not simply evil; they were well aware that their actions brought humiliation, suffering and death to their victims. Their way out of this predicament was that, “instead of saying: What horrible things I did to people!, the murderers would be able to say: What horrible things I had to watch in the pursuance of my duties, how heavily the task weighed upon my shoulders!” In this way, they were able to turn around the logic of resisting temptation: Their “ethical” effort was directed toward the task of resisting the temptation *not* to murder, torture and humiliate. Thus, the very violation of spontaneous ethical instincts of pity and compassion was turned into the proof of ethical grandeur: Doing one’s duty meant assuming the heavy burden of inflicting pain on others.

There was a further “ethical problem” here for Himmler: How to make sure that the SS executioners who performed these terrible acts could remain human and retain their dignity? His answer was found in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, a special leather-bound edition of which he always kept in his pocket. There, Krishna tells Arjuna that he should carry out his acts with an inner distance and never get fully involved in them.

Therein also resides the lie of “24”: The presumption that it is not only possible to retain human dignity in accomplishing acts of terror, but that when an honest person accomplishes such acts as a heavy duty, this confers on him an additional tragic-ethic grandeur. But what if such a distance is possible? What if we *do* have people who commit terrible acts as part of their job, while, in private, they remain loving husbands, good parents and caring friends? As Arendt knew, far from redeeming them, the very fact that they are able to retain their normality while committing such acts is the ultimate confirmation of their moral catastrophe.

So what about the popular and seemingly convincing reply to all these worries and hair-splitting distinctions regarding torture: “What’s all the fuss about? The United States is just openly admitting, at least tacitly, not only what it has been doing all the time, but what all other states have been doing all the time. If anything, we have less hypocrisy now.” To this, one should retort with a simple counter-question: “If this is the only thing that the statements from the U.S. government mean, *why, then, are they admitting this?* Why don’t they just silently go on doing it, as they did before?”

What is inherent to human speech is the irreducible gap between the enunciated content and its act of enunciation: “You say this, but why are you telling me it openly now?” For example, we all know that a polite way to say that we found a colleague’s talk stupid and boring is to say, “That was very interesting.” If instead we openly told our colleague, “That was boring and stupid,” he would be fully justified to be surprised. The act of publicly reporting on something is never neutral—it affects the reported content itself.

The same goes for the recent open admission of torture: When we hear Dick Cheney make obscene statements about the necessity of torture, we should ask: “Why are you saying it publicly?” That is, the question we must raise is: What is there about this statement that made you enunciate it? Thus, what is truly problematic about “24” is not the message it conveys, but the fact that this message is so openly stated. It is a sad indication of the deep change in our ethical and political standards. ■

EXCERPT

Angela Davis' Advice to the Movement

By Eduardo Mendieta

What role can activism play in strengthening democratic and critical practices? What lessons might we learn from past movements of resistance and apply to contemporary struggles?

That is a very difficult question because the terrain on which organizing takes place is so different today from what it was 30 years ago. There are some lessons that have contemporary resonances. Here I want to add the disclaimer that I do not mean to encourage nostalgia about those good old revolutionary days—not at all. But I do think, that there is a sense today in which movements today are expected to be self-generating. There is a lack of patience. It is difficult to encourage people to think about protracted struggles, protracted movements that require very careful strategic organizing interventions

that don't always depend on our capacity to mobilize demonstrations.

It seems to me that mobilization has displaced organization, so that in the contemporary moment, when we think about organizing movements, we think about bringing masses of people into the streets. Of course it is important to encourage masses of people to give expression with their bodies and their voices to collective goals, whether those goals are about ending the war in Iraq or in defense of women's reproductive rights. I have always thought that demonstrations were supposed to demonstrate the potential power of movements. Ongoing movements at certain strategic moments need to mobilize and render visible everyone who is touched by the call for justice, equality, and peace.

But these days we tend to think of that process of rendering the movement visible as the very substance of the movement itself. If this is the case, then the millions who go home after the demonstration have concluded that they do not necessarily feel responsible to further build support for the cause. They are able to return to their private spaces and

express their relationship to this movement in private, individual ways. If the demonstration is the monumental public moment and people return afterwards to lives they construe as private, then, in a sense, we have unwittingly acquiesced to the corporate drive for privatization.

Organizing is not synonymous with mobilizing. Now that many of us have access to new technologies of communication like the Internet and cell phones, we need to give serious thought about how they might best be used. The Internet is an incredible tool, but it may also encourage us to think that we can produce instantaneous movements, movements modeled after fast food delivery.

When organizing is subordinated to mobilizing, what do you do after the successful mobilization? How can we produce a sense of belonging to communities in struggle that is not evaporated by the onslaught of our everyday routines? How do we build movements capable of generating the power to compel governments and corporations to curtail their violence? Ultimately, how can we successfully resist global capitalism and its drive for dominance?

spin cycle

BY JESSICA CLARK AND TRACY VAN SLYKE

Small-screen activism

In a trifecta of organizing, production and distribution, the Sierra Club, Brave New Films and Link TV are teaming up on a seven-part television series to highlight how "pollution, corporate greed and short-sighted government policies affect all of us." Each show will highlight the impact of major environmental issues in local communities, along with corresponding activism. Topics range from the continuing economic and environmental damage wreaked on the Prince William Sound region by the 1988 Exxon oil spill to the devastating toll of air pollution-related health problems on working families in Los

Angeles.

The show, which debuted January 12, will air every second Thursday of the month until July at 8:30 p.m. EST and PST on Link TV (DIRECTV channel 375 and Dish Network channel 9410). The Sierra Club and Brave New Films—which recently produced the direct-to-DVD documentary, *Wal-Mart: The High Cost of Low Price*—are offering alternative modes of distribution. Viewers can download the shows to their computers and video iPods and the DVDs are available at no cost for house parties.

For more information on the series and to download the first episode, "9/11 Forgotten Heroes," visit [www.](http://www.sierraclub.org/tv/)

[sierraclub.org/tv/](http://www.sierraclub.org/tv/).

Really rapid response

Nonprofits and news junkies now have access to a powerful research and spin-monitoring tool. MediaChannel, a "media issues supersite," is partnering with MediaVision, a video search engine, to offer real-time monitoring of cable and network broadcasts to activists at a discounted rate. MediaVision delivers digital video clips to users based on a simple search query or an automated feed keyed to a topic specified by the user.

While "clipping services" have been combing media for customers such as PR firms and political cam-

paigns for decades, MediaVision specializes in "getting it to individuals really fast," says Gregg Reed, the company's chief operating officer. Because the search is based on closed-captioning of the broadcasts, which are available 5-10 seconds after airing, it's possible to receive an alert and respond to an on-air assertion while a show is still in progress. Customers can store clips and share them in the context of research, but can't repost them or distribute them to the public. Check out a demo at www.mediachannel.org.

What factors do you think are mitigating community organizing today? I completely agree with the need for day-to-day organizing and community building, but not having an experiential sense of what it was like on the ground in the early 1970s, I would like to hear your reflections.

Well, you see, everything has changed, so I don't think this kind of discussion would be as helpful as one might think. Everything has changed. The funding base for movements has changed. The relationship between professionalization and social movements has changed. The mode of politicization has changed. The role of culture and the globalization of cultural production have changed. I don't know how else to talk about this other than to encourage people to experiment. That is actually the lesson I would draw from the period of the 1960s and 1970s, when I was involved in what were essentially experimental modes of conventional civil rights organizing. Nobody knew whether they would work or not. Nobody knew where we were going. I often remark that young people today have too much deference toward the older organizers, the veterans, and are much too careful in their desire to rely on role models.

Everyone wants some guarantee that what they do will have palpable results. I think the best way to figure out what might work is simply to do it, regardless of the potential mistakes one might make. One must be willing to make mistakes. In fact, I think that the mistakes help to produce the new modes of organizing—the kinds that bring people together and advance the struggle for peace and social justice. ■

This article was adapted from Abolition Democracy—Beyond Empire, Prisons, and Torture: Interviews with Angela Y. Davis, which was just released by Seven Stories Press.

BOOKS

Of Crafts and Causes

By Phoebe Connelly

CRAFTS ARE OFFICIALLY cool again. At many a chain bookstore, *ReadyMade* magazine's new book, *ReadyMade: How to Make (Almost) Everything*, isn't tucked away in the "Crafts" section, but stacked four high on the front display table.

excerpt

Artist Michael Rokowitz's work explores the use of public space to address social needs. In the late '90s, he began a series of collaborations with homeless men to create portable housing units, *paraSITES*, crafted from vinyl and nylon, that were heated by attaching to outside building vents. His most recent project, *(P)lot*, is a collapsible frame that turns commercially produced car covers into a tent—allowing users to reappropriate public parking spaces as temporary housing. The following is taken from an interview published in the exhibition catalog for *Beyond Green: Toward a Sustainable Art* at the Smart Museum of Art at University of Chicago.

Do you think that the dialogue that takes place within museums and galleries provides cultural capital that can then push your work further into other, more public conversations?

Yes. The culture audience is not the primary audience, but it's important. There's a really great Hans Haacke quote about this. He was asked if he felt that his work could ever change the world, and he said he doesn't think that he can change the world, but he can change the dinner conversation. I love that. The gallery is a cultural space that's frequented by people who hold power and who are share-holders for companies like Exxon or Mobil, and they might go home and be enraged that this company that they are supporting financially is participating in, say, a breach on international sanctions against South Africa, and that person might go and enact something in terms of a change. So you can connect with the ethical cogs in the machinery that you're critiquing, and that will in turn make the machinery run differently.

Hip, design-savvy and eco-friendly, the book embodies one pole of a flourishing craft movement that draws equal inspiration from politics, art and urban living. It signals the latest incarnation of the craft movement—which appears every time a new generation discovers the pleasure of handicraft (recall the '60s back-to-the-land, *Whole Earth Catalog* crowd). The book joins a crop of new craft titles that draw from the best of Martha Stewart, then add a dash of your dumpster-diving, protest-attending college roommate.

ReadyMade magazine, which started publishing in 2001, released its eponymous resource book in December, just in time for the deluge of holiday shoppers simultaneously over-consumed and broke. The magazine's title comes from surrealist Marcel Duchamp, who coined it to refer to the ordinary objects he altered or signed and then called art.

"Learn how to turn everyday objects into spellbinding inventions," the cover blurb invites. "Our simple self-improvement techniques will make you smarter, better looking, and more well-adjusted."

Organized by material (paper, plastic, wood, metal, glass and fabric), each section provides brief history of the sub-

stance and an overview of its manufacturing. Then come the projects, rated on a difficulty level from "monkey" to "craftsman" (who "knows that a 'stud finder is not a matchmaking service!'), each with its own stylized icon. The "Remake This!" sections showcase a project they tried to make work, but which ended up more complicated than pleasing. Most cloying or endearing—depending how much the *McSweeney's* crowd raises your bile—are the clever non-craft lessons: "How to Make a Film Like Ingmar Bergman," "A Look Back at the Origins of Heavy Metal" and "How to Tell a Good Story."

They are the most ambitious aspect of the book, arguing that the craft ethos applies to one's entire life. They hark back to the *Foxfire* books (recently reissued by Anchor Books), the pioneering oral history project of the '70s, which had Georgia high school students interview elders in their communities for histories on everything from washing laundry in an iron tub to telling ghost stories. Here though, Grandma's been replaced by Ira Glass.

Still, there is an uneasy relationship between the rhetoric of reuse and refashion and the underlying comfort with con-

sumption. The introduction to the paper section provides dismaying statistics about paper manufacturing, but they're quickly bracketed with cheery reassurances: "The good news is that trees are renewable, and American farms, planting millions of seeds each year now contribute nearly 90 percent of the raw material used to make paper." Phew! For a second there it sounded as if we should put down our crafts and organize around that.

Glossy, modernist *ReadyMade* sits on the design end of this new craft-resurgence, with inside cover blurbs from celeb aesthetes like Dave Eggers and Todd Oldham. But another strand of the craft movement, one that views itself as overtly political, utilizes DIY (do it yourself) as a means of subverting disposable consumption, and questions the ghettoizing of crafts as women's work. It's grown up in conjunction with postfeminist magazines *Bitch*, *Bust* and *Venus*, and has ties to various activist communities.

Greg Der Ananian's *Bazaar Bizarre: Not Your Granny's Crafts!* proudly flies its freak flag. Named for the bi-coastal craft fair run by its author, *Bazaar Bizarre* is a collection of how-to-make-it presentations by the fair's artists, from sock monkeys to mini-shrines made of Altoids boxes. Der Ananian introduces each crafter with a short bio, a mug shot and brief Q&A. Clearly the edgier of the two books, the difficulty level of each craft here is given in number of anarchist symbols—one to five.

Der Ananian takes on one of the complicated questions of the craft movement, asking each crafter "What is the difference between an 'art' and a 'craft'?" Many of the artists—Der Ananian's term—argue that their work is designed to break down this distinction that pits "skills" against "functionality." The best answer, however, belongs to Stacie Dolins: "Art goes on your wall. Art rhymes with fart; craft rhymes with daft."

More is at work here than just a punk

sensibility (though Der Ananian does have a disclaimer box to explicate the book's use of "punk" and "punk rock.") There's the question of class. *ReadyMade* has always emanated a college-educated, streamlined, art-school vibe, while *Bazaar Bizarre* is solidly broke, challenge-the-establishment, rock-kid DIY. The difference is made amusingly clear in their choice of joking drug references: On the topic of office paper, *ReadyMade*, assures readers they are "very much in favor of the recreational use of the white stuff," while *Bazaar Bizarre* cautions crafters to keep the industrial-strength glue "away from the huffers."

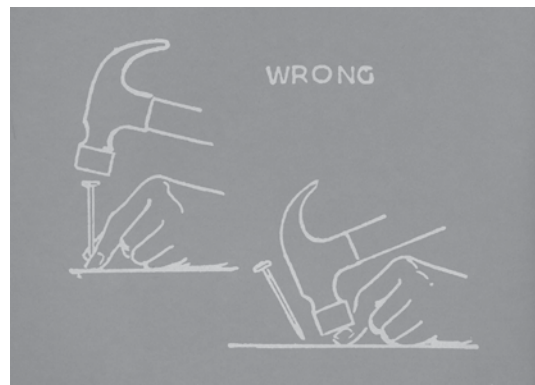
This resistance to the status quo likely informs *Bazaar Bizarre's* choice to confront the underlying gender roles of the craft movement. Crafts have traditionally been associated with homemakers, a stereotype *Bazaar Bizarre* tackles head on. One section, "Watch Where You Put That Frigant Distaff!," concludes:

We as crafters can figuratively and literally cut the ties that bind us to the notion that crafts are quiet or weak. The predictably precious imagery of commercialized decorative crafting only fosters the lame sexist ideas surrounding traditional handicrafts and their worth in a culture that wants to keep crafts in a very specific devalued pocket of representation. I suggest we take hold of the distaff of appropriation and beat the husband of dominant aesthetics.

So which is it? Is the resurgent craft movement a new form of consumption, albeit with more felt and assembly, or is it a bold political act that challenges the way we think about gender roles and how we engage with our commodified world?

The crafters themselves seem conflicted. Daniel Tucker, an activist and editor of the Chicago "art/education/activism" magazine *Area*, questions whether those involved in the emergent hip-craft movement have really asked themselves what they are trying to do. "If we should buy locally made goods, what is their analysis about local economies and how they work or could work better?" Tucker asks. "How sustainable is it for people to buy their products from hipsters?"

Even those at the center of the emerging "hip" craft fairs don't always identify their actions as political. Cassie Allen, of the Chicago Women's Craft Collective, says that her involvement with crafts began not as a political action, but



ReadyMade: Redecorating the status quo.

as "creative time with other women, in a shared space." And while she says her crafts challenge the corporate, mass-produced status quo, "Corporate culture has embraced the craft movement—the tiny Jo-Ann Fabrics near where I work just turned into a Jo-Ann megastore." For her, some of the revolutionary nature of this resurgence was that people, especially women, were finding validation as well as markets for their crafts.

Sue Blatt, co-founder of the Renegade Craft Fair in Chicago, which just expanded to Brooklyn, echoes this idea. "We didn't think of it as political, although I guess it could be taken that way," Blatt says. "We just wanted to take charge, provide a venue for the emerging DIY revolution that was happening but didn't have a place in the mainstream."

Perhaps that's enough. This new craft movement has fought its way into our popular culture with some of its reuse, DIY ethic intact. It's given a new generation of crafters, many of them women, a market and a vehicle for community.

"I'm very wary of making the DIY craft movement into something bigger than it is," says Annie Tomlin, who is herself a crafter and covers the DIY movement as an editor at *Time Out Chicago*. "Some people make overt political statements with their crafted work, while others just like to 'make stuff.' In that latter category, I don't see a lot of room for intentional activism. Knitting an iPod cozy alone isn't going to protect the right to an abortion." ■

ReadyMade: How To Make (Almost) Everything

by Shoshana Berger and Grace Hawthorne, Clarkson Potter, 205 pages, \$25

Bazaar Bizarre: Not Your Granny's Crafts!

by Greg Der Ananian, Viking, 253 pages, \$16.95

BY TERRY J. ALLEN

Information Is Power

SOMETIMES IT'S THE SMALL abuses scurrying below radar that reveal how profoundly the Bush administration has changed America in the name of national security. Buried within the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 is a regulation that bars most public access to birth and death certificates for 70 to 100 years. In much of the country, these records have long been invaluable tools for activists, lawyers, and reporters to uncover patterns of illness and pollution that officials miss or ignore.

In These Times has obtained a draft of the proposed regulations now causing widespread concern among state officials. It reveals plans to create a vast database of vital records to be centralized in Washington, and details measures that states must implement—and pay millions for—before next year's scheduled implementation.

The draft lays out how some 60,000 already strapped town and county offices must keep the birth and death records under lock and key and report all document requests to Washington. Individuals who show up in person will still be able to obtain their own birth certificates,

and in some cases, the birth and death records of an immediate relative; and “legitimate” research institutions may be able to access files. But reporters and activists won't be allowed to fish through records; many family members looking for genetic clues will be out of luck; and people wanting to trace adoptions will dead-end. If you are homeless and need your own birth certificate, forget it: no address, no service.

Consider the public health implications. A few years back, a doctor in a tiny Vermont town noticed that two patients who lived on the same hill had ALS or Lou Gehrig's disease. Hearing rumors of more cases of the relatively rare and always fatal disease, the doctor notified the health department. Citing lack of resources, it declined to investigate. The doc then told a reporter, who searched the death certificates filed in the town office only to find that ALS had already killed five of the town's 1,300 residents. It was statistically possible, but unlikely, that this 10-times higher-than-normal incidence was simply chance. Since no one knows what causes ALS, clusters like this one, once revealed, help epidemiologists assess risk factors, warn doctors to watch for symptoms, and alert neighbors and activists.

Activists in Colorado already know what it is like when states bar access to vital records. For years, they fought the Cotter Corporation, claiming that its uranium mining operations were killing residents and workers. Unwilling to rely on the health department, which they claimed had a “cozy” relationship with the polluters, the activists tried to access death records, only to be told that it was illegal in this closed-record state. An editorial in Colorado's *Longmont Daily Times-Call* lamented, “If there's a situation that makes the case for why death certificates should be available to the public, it is th[is] Superfund area.”

Some of state officials around the country are questioning whether the new regulations themselves illegally tread on states'

rights. But the feds have been coy. Richard McCoy, public health statistic chief in Vermont, one of the nation's 14 open records states, says, “No state is mandated to meet the regs. However if they don't, then residents of that state will not be able to access any federal services, including social security and passports. States have no choice.”

But while the public loses access to records, the federal government gains a gargantuan national database easily cross-referenced in the name of national security. The feds' claim that increased security will deter identity theft and terrorism is facile. Wholesale corporate data gathering is the major nexus of identity theft. As for terrorism, all the 9/11 perpetrators had valid identification.

Meanwhile, the quiet clampdown on vital records is part of a growing consolidation of information at the federal level. “That information will dovetail with the Real ID Act of 2005,” says Marc Rotenberg of the Electronic Privacy Information Center. “Real ID cards are the other shoe that is scheduled to drop in three years.” That act, signed into law last May, establishes national standards for state-issued driver's licenses and ID cards, and centralizes the information into a database.


Aside from public health and privacy concerns, closing vital records incurs a steep intangible cost: It undermines community in places where that healthy ethos still survives. In small town America, the local clerk's office is a sociable place where government wears the face of your neighbor. Each year, Vermont's 246 towns distribute their vital statistics to all residents. “It's the first place everybody goes in the Town Report,” says state archivist Gregory Sanford. “Who was born, who died, who got married, who had a baby and wasn't married.”

This may not be the most dramatic danger to democracy, but it is one of the Bush administration's many quiet, incremental assaults on the health of America's body politic. And it may end up listed on the death certificate for open society. ■



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